

Theology of Revolution: Messianic Traditions and the Revolutions They Inspired

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Global and International Studies and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## **Abstract**

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Many scholars have long held that religious disputes are a major source of prolonged conflict. Accordingly, as religious zeal continues to be a primary motivator in conflicts throughout the modern world, the ability to understand the conditions under which religious movements erupt in violence and overthrow the existing government becomes increasingly important. This analysis examines four case studies to determine those factors most influential to a messianic movement's overall success.

A qualitative regression analysis was then conducted across twenty-five messianic movements, both revolutionary and pacifist, to determine which of these factors is statistically significant. Of the characteristics identified throughout the case studies, only a portion were determined to be statistically significant indicators of a movement's success. In a general sense it is a recent reversal of status, often the result of war, plague, or natural disaster, which prompted a messianic movement's transition to violence. Those movements that have some level of mysticism inherent within them also influenced the movement's escalation to violence. However, it is the charismatic authority, along with the presence of some outsider or 'other' particularly in a position of power, who unites a movement and ultimately impacts the movement's ability to overthrow the government. If the movement has some feelings of elitism and antinomianism along with mystical elements, they are also more likely to succeed in overthrowing the government. The typical signs of the end times: plague, natural disasters, and war also play a role in a movement's success. In the end, however, it is the element of permissive authority that is the most important factor. It is not until the existing government chooses to ignore the movement's progress, or fails to defeat the movement in its first revolutionary act, that the movement can successfully overthrow the established authority.

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## Section I – A Brief Introduction

In recent history, the resurgence of religious zeal has often come to define state interactions. Contemporary authors compete to release the latest analysis on the impact of religion in modern history. Historically, religion has played a significant role in instigating social change. Apocalyptic, millenarian, messianic, and mahdistic movements have often resorted to violence to realize their assertions. Millennialism first emerged as a field of study within sociology following the publication of Norman Cohn's influential work, *In Pursuit of the Millennium*. Scholarship exists, not only on the Judeo-Christian tradition, but within other major religions as well, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

Following Cohn's seminal work, many authors embarked on the difficult journey of documenting millennial movements across time and space. However, many of these same authors noticed that even though religion was often considered a revolutionary force, few studies examined historical examples of religion's revolutionary power. Rather the larger community relied on sociological theory such as Max Weber's innovative work in which he concludes that religion is "the source of dynamic social change."<sup>1</sup> Even though Weber's theory provided an introduction to the process of summarizing "the facts derived from a comparison of things in time," it did not spur further analysis until the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> During this period case studies of specific millennial movements became extremely popular. Since then, many scholars have struggled to conduct single case studies on specific millennial movements, as well as comparative analysis on millennial movements in a single religion or a single locale. In spite of this, scholars have been hesitant to compare millennial movements across time and space in varying religious traditions.<sup>3</sup>

In the numerous examinations of these movements, a glaring omission exists, primarily in the realm of comparative analysis. The question of how and why these movements emerge, regardless of the overarching religious ideology is an important one, particularly as mahdistic eschatology surfaces in contemporary Iran and elsewhere throughout the Middle East. This

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Murvar, Vatro. "Toward a Sociological Theory of Religious Movements." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 14.3 (1975): 231.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the literature review, comparative analysis across religious traditions seems to be considered somewhat taboo. Christian millennial movements have been examined by authors such as Norman Cohn or Bryan Wilson. Islamic mahdistic movements have been examined by authors such as Hayrettin Yucesoy, William Tucker, Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, Gabriel Ben-Dor, Timothy Furnish, Said Amir Arjomand, and Abbas Amanat. This is not to say that authors have not conducted comparative analysis across religious traditions. David C. Rapoport and David Zeidan are two examples of authors that have examined Jewish, Christian, and Islamic movements in a single publication.

cautiousness may be due to concern regarding reductionism. However, it is through these comparisons that innovative thought emerges, illuminating areas previously untouched. Comparisons can be quite useful, especially if an accepted methodology is employed that “balances descriptive particularities with explanatory generalities.”<sup>4</sup>

Comparative studies form the core of the social sciences precisely because they “search for similarities in what appears to be different and for differences in what appears to be similar.”<sup>5</sup> By relying on comparisons, the results of the analysis are often strengthened through replication of the explanation-building process. The concern over invalidating analysis through comparisons of dissimilar topics has been discussed by Ninian Smart who refutes this notion. Smart contends “that while each variant is unique” a range of “alike-claims always exist, yielding important insights and raising fruitful questions.”<sup>6</sup> The resurgence of fundamentalism in particular has led to an increase in comparative analysis across religious traditions. Martin Riesebrodt notes that even though all religious movements have particular features specific to the tradition from which they emerge, it is the common features that are perhaps more relevant from a sociological perspective. These common features point towards the possibility that “such movements emerge under the impact of rather similar processes of social transformation,” and allow us to gain an increased understanding of the intricacies associated with religion as an instigator of social and political change.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the basic and general considerations all comparative analysis must manage, there are issues unique to the study of millennialism as well. Challenges with normative definitions plague researchers. The terminology is often treated interchangeably; however, each term offers a particular connotation. David Cook, one of the leading authorities on Islamic *hadiths*, applies the term *apocalyptic* to those hadiths that concern the events leading up to, but not encompassing, the end of time. By contrast Timothy Furnish believes that Western readers will negatively associate the term with their own belief system. In so doing they misinterpret the

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<sup>4</sup> Zeidan, David. “A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourse,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2003 30 (1), 43. This notion also appears in Jeffrey R. Carter, “Description is Not Explanation: A Methodology of Comparison,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 10(2)(1998), p. 133-148.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Ben-Dor, “The Uniqueness of Islamic Fundamentalism,” in Bruce Maddy-Weizeman and Efraim Inbar (eds) *Islamic Fundamentalism in the Greater Middle East*. London: Frank Cass, 1997, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> Smart, Ninian. *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs*. London: Harper-Collins, 1996, p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Riesebrodt, Martin. “Fundamentalism and the Resurgence of Religion.” *Numen* 47(3), 266.

text.<sup>8</sup> *Messianism* traditionally refers to the devotion associated with the individual chosen by God to perform a critical function in an end time scenario. One of the most common components of messianic movements is “the belief in a decisive turning point in history that demarcates the present age from one that will be, for the believer, much better.”<sup>9</sup> Messianism provides millenarian movements with a context regarding the end of the world and what can be expected to come next. *Millennialism*, on the other hand, specifically refers to the belief “that Christ will establish a one-thousand year reign of the saints on earth before the Last Judgment,” implying a period of abundance on earth.<sup>10</sup> *Mahdism* has been considered a type of Islamic millennialism.<sup>11</sup> But critical distinctions are too significant to disregard. Unlike Western millennial movements, the century proves more important than the millennium in Islamic movements.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, scholarship suggests that messianism should be avoided when discussing Islamic movements because Muslim theology does not await a messiah in the traditional sense. Jesus’ return is but one sign that the end is near; both the Mahdi, or “rightly-guided one,” and Jesus must perform critical tasks within the normal span of space and time. The primary goal of those tasks will be “collective justice and peace rather than individual salvation.”<sup>13</sup> Regardless of these distinctions, many authors examining Islamic movements continue to refer to them as messianic or millennial.<sup>14</sup> In order to acknowledge the differences between Christian messianic movements and Islamic mahdistic movements, this research will apply these terms where appropriate. The notion of examining such movements becomes quite daunting when accounting for the issues surrounding terminology, the complexities of religious overlap and influence, and each movement’s unique development and interaction with its native setting.

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<sup>8</sup> Cook, David. *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*. New York: Syracuse University, 2005. Timothy Furnish. *Holiest Wars*. Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Landes, Richard, ed. “Messianism.” *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*. New York: Routledge, 2000: p. 245.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, “Millennialism in the Western World.” p. 257.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, “Islam” p. 187.

<sup>12</sup> Millennialism derives from the thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on Earth as accepted by both Jews and Christians. However, “the tradition of a mujaddid or “renewer” who comes every century carries far more resonance with Muslims.” It is for this reason the term millennialism should be avoided when discussing Islamic movements. Derived from Timothy Furnish’s article on “Islam” in the *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*. New York: Routledge, 2000: p. 331.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

<sup>14</sup> Authors such as William Tucker, Abbas Amanat, and Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina use the terms millennial and messianic interchangeably to describe Islamic movements of this nature. Timothy Furnish is one of the only scholars to distinguish Islamic movements as mahdistic.



Historical analysis conducted by scholars on many of these movements requires extensive textual interpretation. Further complicating the need for textual interpretation is the trend in contemporary analysis, particularly in the social sciences, which do not rely on textual analysis, to focus solely on the socio-economic factors “conducive to the shaping of the movements and their evolution.”<sup>15</sup> By ignoring the unique teachings of messianic and mahdist movements, scholars have overlooked a significant aspect of the rationale many of these movements rely on to gain adherents and transition towards violence. Abbas Amanat, in particular, believes it is this unique rationale which “engenders a sense of adherence more compelling for believers than any ulterior motive.”<sup>16</sup> Scholars of millennialism tend to focus on either the external socio-economic factors bearing on specific groups, or the internal group dynamics and teachings of the group(s) in question. However, both internal and external factors significantly impact the way in which these movements developed and the success they wrought.

Numerous authors and scholars have proposed attributes common to many messianic and mahdistic movements. It would be negligent to ignore the wealth of information currently available in the field. Norman Cohn offers a very specific set of conditions necessary for messianic movements to flourish. Each movement constructed its own tradition and lore through a reinterpretation of ancient text and new revelation, when necessary. They drew strength from “populations living on the margin of society,” unable to find a specific place or role in said society.<sup>17</sup> As traditional social groups disintegrated, many individuals lost the emotional support available to them prior to the increased urbanization of city centers. This revolutionary fervor often followed a disaster, such as plague or famine.<sup>18</sup> Cohn also offered an assessment of the *propheta*, or charismatic figure, leading the movements. These individuals “were usually intellectuals or half-intellectuals – the former priest turned freelance preacher was the commonest of all.”<sup>19</sup> He/she often possessed “a personal magnetism which enabled him to claim, with some show of plausibility, a special role in bringing history to its appointed consummation.”<sup>20</sup> Essentially, these movements often occurred in societies struggling with the

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<sup>15</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2009: p. 34

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 35

<sup>17</sup> Cohn, Norman. *Pursuit of the Millennium*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970: p. 282

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 282. Cohn documents that the plagues were followed by the First Crusade and flagellant movements; famines were followed by the First and Second Crusades, as well as the movements around Eon and the pseudo-Baldwin. There was an enormous rise in prices that was quickly followed by the revolution at Munster.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 284.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 285.

process of modernization, and the dislocation and disorientation that accompanies this progression. However, in urban locations that have already hurdled into the modern world, individuals who felt left behind, unable to find where they fit, were often eager to join a movement in which they could feel a part of something larger than themselves. Vatro Murvar analyzed not only revolutionary messianic movements, but revolutionary religious movements in general, for commonalities and defined a list of several attributes typical of each. He does note that a charismatic figure within revolutionary movements, although not always necessary, does tend to “make the movement more durable and successful.”<sup>21</sup> In Hayrettin Yucesoy’s examination of mahdism<sup>22</sup> in medieval Islam he notes the tendency of many scholars, including Mannheim, Weber, and Cohn to regard messianism and mahdism as a “religion of deprived groups, including lower social classes and oppressed and persecuted minorities.”<sup>23</sup> Conversely, Yucesoy argues that many supporters of these movements were undoubtedly frustrated with their present conditions and certainly desired change, but “they were not necessarily fanatical individuals, underprivileged poor, or marginalized groups.”<sup>24</sup> Messianic and mahdist movements were often a means of not only “coping with sociopolitical reality but also of changing the status quo,” and often appealed to the learned elite.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Yucesoy argues that “even rulers assumed messianic roles to shape and change the political and social institutions of their realms, which gives credence to the notion that messianic movements could support political institutions and even encourage institutional change.”<sup>26</sup> William Tucker also examines early Shi’ite mahdist movements and notes that “such characteristics as militant elitism, reversal of status, antinomianism, and, frequently, a sense of relative deprivation or perceived injustice are often associated with millenarian movements.”<sup>27</sup> Tucker makes it quite clear that he aligns with Cohn’s analysis of messianic and mahdist movements. In a sense he is simply

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<sup>21</sup> Murvar, Vatro. “Toward a Sociological Theory of Religious Movements.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 14.3 (1975): p. 254

<sup>22</sup> Yucesoy specifically refers to this phenomenon as messianic; however, for consistency within this work it will be referred to as mahdism.

<sup>23</sup> Yucesoy, Hayrettin. *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam*. South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009: p. 6

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 6. See also Lerner’s *Power of Prophecy*. This is certainly true in Islam, in which the learned elite represented the carriers of knowledge, and is especially true of periods in which “rulers assumed messianic roles to shape and change the political and social institutions of their realms.” (p. 6) This will be discussed more in depth in the coming chapters.

<sup>27</sup> Tucker, William. *Mahdis and Millenarians*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. p. xviii

supplementing Cohn's work with an in-depth analysis of Islamic mahdist movements, which he sees as a gap in the current available research. Timothy Furnish also attempts to fill a gap in contemporary scholarship by examining Sunni mahdist movements. Furnish evaluates eight case studies and concludes that most were peripheral in both geography and socio-political class. In each case there was a "declared jihad, some degree of Sufi adherence, and grievances against an extant Muslim government and its European Christian allies."<sup>28</sup> In a sense, there does appear to be some overlap between messianic and mahdist movements, specifically in terms of the importance of a charismatic figure and the use of religion as a tool to empower and to instigate change. Even though each author discusses the motivating ideology to provide the context surrounding the emergence of such movements, it is the external socio-economic factors that tend to provide the commonalities across movements.

Based on the available literature a few trends seem to be found in both Christian and Islamic movements, including the importance of a charismatic authority and antinomianism. Several scholars mention a recent reversal of status due to natural disaster, modernization, or plague as characterizing a typical movement's followers. Along these same lines, many feel persecuted, and the elitism of these movements provides followers with a sense of belonging. There seems to be some disagreement on the socio-economic situations of these followers. Scholars of the Christian movements identify them as peasants, whereas, scholars of the Islamic movements see them as coming from a broader segment of society. Specifically the scholarship on Sunni movements identifies mysticism and colonialism as key to the typical movement's progression. These traits are not specifically identified by the other authors; however, they will be examined for merit in this analysis. For our purposes, these factors will form the basis of our list of traits from which we will include or remove items as appropriate.

The aim of this analysis is to identify uniformities across four messianic movements. Of the selected cases, two are Christian, the Anabaptists and the Savonarolans, and two are Islamic, Muhammad Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah, the Mahdi of Sudan, and the Babi movement. These movements represent the most cited examples of revolutionary messianic movements. Each movement was considered revolutionary, carried out in the name of salvation and was successful, that is, it resulted in the revolutionists' gaining power at least for a period of time, before becoming a pacifist movement. As this is a preliminary analysis of sorts, determined to

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<sup>28</sup> Furnish, Timothy. *Holiest Wars*. Connecticut: Praeger, 2005. p. 62

systematize uniformities across religious traditions, we shall progress with the knowledge that we have selected four revolutionary messianic movements quite deliberately in spite of the fact that many more have occurred that fit our criteria quite well.<sup>29</sup>

Traditionally, comparative analysis in the social sciences relies heavily on case studies to identify commonalities. This analysis, however, will reach beyond the traditional qualitative research methodology to attempt a determination of which uniformities, or independent variables, have the greatest impact on messianic movements transitioning towards violence and those variables that have the greatest impact on successfully holding the government.

Qualitative regression analysis will provide a general indication of which variables are most significant in each case. Combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies will hopefully provide some level of overlap that increases the research's validity and points towards specific variables that might provide the most fruit for further research. The notion of "combining," at least to some degree, qualitative and quantitative research tends to result in a general feeling of uneasiness for readers and researchers alike. As Gary King remarks, "the two traditions appear quite different; indeed they sometimes seem to be at war."<sup>30</sup> Quantitative research relies on statistical methods covering a wide number of cases to infer from; whereas, qualitative research by nature tends to focus on a small number of cases, but unearth vast amounts of information that can lead to conclusions. Many in the social sciences have debated the pros and cons of qualitative versus quantitative research, with both sides tending to believe the other is irrelevant. As King notes, "the differences between the quantitative and qualitative traditions are only stylistic and are methodologically and substantively unimportant."<sup>31</sup> So before jumping into the analysis head-on, it is important to have a general understanding of the benefits and limitations of each method employed.

As the qualitative method will be employed first, it will be discussed here first as well. Case studies are generally characterized by a detailed examination of a single event, or series of events, which exhibit(s) the process of a previously identified general theoretical principle.<sup>32</sup> One significant advantage to this approach lies in the richness available through detailed analysis

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<sup>29</sup> Refer to Timothy Furnish for an analysis of Sunni mahdist movements, William Tucker for Shi'ite mahdist movements, Norman Cohn for messianic movements,

<sup>30</sup> King, Gary. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, J.C. "Case and situation analysis," *Sociological Review*, 31 (1983):186-211.

from multiple perspectives.<sup>33</sup> Multiple cases reinforce the results of the analysis, by replicating the explanation-building process, increasing the theory's strength and reliability. As with any research method, disadvantages do exist. One such criticism describes the increased level of bias that potentially exists as researchers run the risk of forming subjective judgments throughout the data collection phase, invalidating the construct.<sup>34</sup> Measuring the external validity of the analysis becomes an issue as well, one that can be avoided by relying on multiple case studies.<sup>35</sup> Multiple case studies are often considered more robust, and can assist in determining linkages and patterns of theoretical importance for a specific population. It remains quite important to emphasize that case studies deal specifically with unique situations; therefore, it remains impossible to make direct comparisons of the data to the universal realm.<sup>36</sup>

Researchers have shown that in order to build theory from case study research, it is important to account for the problems of validity and reliability.<sup>37</sup> Eisenhardt describes a specific process for developing theory based on qualitative analysis. The analysis of collected data forms the central element of building a theory from case studies; however, it is the most difficult portion of the process. This analysis is primarily based on comparisons that exist between the empirical evidence and the theoretical propositions developed during the initial stages of the study. This process involves comprehensive case-study reports for each case examined. The intended objective is to become well-versed on each case as a standalone entity. Each case is a "bounded system," in which each fact or measurement is interconnected to the rest. Yin emphasizes the importance of each individual case study representing an entire study on its own, capable of independent examination. This specific process allows the unique characteristics of each case to emerge individually, before any generalized pattern is examined.

Once each case has been examined individually, cross-case comparisons are implemented. This portion of the analysis will rely on explanation-building, an alternative to process matching, which will result in analysis by building an explanation about the case. The final phase of the theory building process involves a comparison of the propositions developed

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<sup>33</sup> Zonabend, F. "The monograph in European ethnology," *Current Sociology*, 40 (1992): 49-60.

<sup>34</sup> Becker, H.S. *Writing for social scientists: how to start and finish your thesis*. Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1986.

<sup>35</sup> Berger, M.A. "In defence of the case method: a reply to Algyris," *Academy of Management Review*, 8 (1983): 329-386.

<sup>36</sup> Santos, 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Eisenhardt, K.M. "Building theories from case study research," *Academy of Management Review*, 14 (1989): 532-555.

for each individual case.<sup>38</sup> These analysis techniques form an iterative process of proposing and checking statements, both inductively and deductively.<sup>39</sup> Tying this emergent theory to the existing literature enhances the internal validity and the ability to generalize the theory to the larger framework. Once cross-case comparisons are complete, the emergent theory is compared with the theoretical framework identified throughout the literature review process. This is a critical portion of the theory-building research because the findings are based on a limited number of cases. The ability to tie this theory to a larger body of literature allows for increased validation.

Linking this research to a larger body of literature is precisely what the quantitative method allows for. Once a general set of uniformities are identified, more precise data gathering can begin across a larger set of cases to identify whether these same uniformities appear to impact the movement's transition towards violence and overall success. The case studies provide the theoretical model necessary to identify which potential explanatory variables should be included in the analysis. The multiple regression models will ultimately determine which of these variables appear to be most important. Regression analysis "is a statistical tool for the investigation of relationships between variables."<sup>40</sup> Generally it is used to identify the causal effect, if any, one variable has on another. In other words, the impact that identified uniformities across case studies have on a movement's transition to violence. Regression analysis can also assess the overall significance of the relationship, or "the degree of confidence that the true relationship is close to the estimated relationship."<sup>41</sup> Each variable will be evaluated for correlation to ensure that two highly-correlated variables are not included as independent variables in the potential regression models. Once each variable is determined to be independent, regression analysis will be performed to identify those that are "statistically significant," with a "significance level" of at least .15 – in other words, those variables that have at least an 85% impact on the dependent variable. As this analysis has focused on identifying significant uniformities across movements, it is these "statistically significant" variables that are of greatest interest. As a continued word of caution, although regression can be, and often is,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 532.

<sup>39</sup> Turner, B.A. "The use of grounded theory for the qualitative analysis of organizational behavior," *Journal of Management Studies*, 20 (1983): 333-348.

<sup>40</sup> Sykes, Alan O. "An Introduction to Regression Analysis." *Inaugural Coarse Lecture*. University of Chicago, The Law School.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

used for predictive analysis, in this case it is not. In support of this analysis, regression analysis will further refine the results of the qualitative assessment and identify areas for potential continued research. Inference is an imperfect art, even with the use of statistical analysis. The significant variables become characteristics typically present in movements that transition towards violence. This does not preclude, however, other factors that may be significant to igniting messianic movements towards violence. Regression models are only as functional as the data that is supplied. If a significant factor was overlooked in the qualitative assessment, it would most certainly be excluded from the quantitative as well.

This research consists of four sections. The next section is devoted to an examination of the traditions found within Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The third section evaluates each case study chronologically, examining the background, messianic claims, transition to violence, and eventual suppression. The final section considers the similarities and differences in both external and internal factors, with the results of the regression analysis, ultimately offering a few final thoughts on the nature of these movements, and the importance of such analysis in a contemporary setting.

## Section II - Messianic and Mahdist Traditions

Most millennial scholarship adheres to the conviction that the major religions did have some level of influence on one another throughout their development. Sasanian Persia, centered on what is now modern Iran, adhered to a set of teachings administered by the prophet Zarathushtra, who most likely lived during the first millennium BCE. The Zoroastrians believed in two gods, one good, Ahura-Mazda, and one bad, Ahriman. Aside from obvious attributes such as heaven and hell, angels and demons, and judgment, Zoroastrian eschatology refers to the appearance of two messianic figures, the Saoshyant, at the end of time. These figures, Usedar and Pisyotan, will succeed one another, the first ushering in the second's reign. Scholars believe many of the religion's leading doctrines "were adopted by Judaism, Christianity and Islam."<sup>42</sup>

Much of the revolutionary eschatology espoused by messianic and mahdist movements throughout history has been developed from a diverse collection of prophecies inherited from the ancient world.<sup>43</sup> The earliest of these traditions were embraced or produced by the Jews. Cohn specifically describes the ability of the Jews to adopt the view that "they were themselves the Chosen People of the one God."<sup>44</sup> For Cohn, this ability directly influenced the millennial eschatology they developed, and allowed them to embrace hardship and oppression with the knowledge that, in the end, they would triumph. In Judaism, the belief in the eventual coming of the *mashiach*, or "the anointed one," is fundamental to the faith, referring to the ancient practice of anointing kings with oil as they assumed the throne. The *mashiach* will descend from King David<sup>45</sup> following a period of great war and suffering.<sup>46</sup> This mortal will initiate the political and spiritual salvation of the Jewish people through the restoration of Jerusalem and the eventual return to Israel.<sup>47</sup> The *mashiach* is often seen not only as a charismatic leader, but as a strong and righteous military figure as well. The period following the *mashiach*'s appearance is often referred to as *olam ha-ba*, or the "coming world", in Jewish literature. This age is characterized

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<sup>42</sup> Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their religious beliefs and practices*. New York: Routledge, 2001. p. 1. This idea is also expressed by other scholars as well, to include: Timothy Furnish, Solomon Alexander Nigosian, and Peter Clark.

<sup>43</sup> Cohn, p. 19

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> "Jeremiah 23:5" *New American Bible*. Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. "Ezekiel 38:16."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. "Isaiah 11:11-12"; "Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3"; "Hosea 3:4-5."



by humanity's peaceful coexistence,<sup>48</sup> and the return of Judaism as the world's only true religion.<sup>49</sup>

Christian messianism is distinct from its Jewish predecessor. The great military leader was transformed into humanity's spiritual savior. The Second Coming of Christ often falls into one of three broad categories, generally referred to as amillennial, premillennial, and postmillennial. Amillennialists traditionally believe that the millennium depicted in Revelation 20:1-6 will be fulfilled spiritually before the Second Coming. The millennium began with Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and will eventually be consummated with Jesus' return. The thousand years are a symbolic representation of the period before Jesus' return in judgment of man. Premillennialists believe that a period of great tribulation will directly precede the Second Coming. Following the return of Christ, a period of 1000 years will pass before the eschatological events described in Revelation occur. Postmillennialists, on the other hand, believe that the period of 1,000 years of peace and righteousness will directly precede the return of Jesus Christ. At the end of this peaceful millennial period, the events depicted in Revelation will occur, culminating in the Battle of Armageddon and ultimately the return of Jesus Christ in judgment.

Although it is important to note the variety of eschatological beliefs found in Christian messianism, especially as the various Christian denominations do not agree on the external factors, such as timing, events, or duration that will precede the Second Coming, it is perhaps more significant that the apocalyptic traditions so common throughout contemporary Christian thinking was far from universally accepted by early Christians. Cohn in particular emphasized the distinctly militant view oppressed Christians formed of the messianic age, one that presaged their ascension into a position of authority within organized religion. They too believed that "their wrongs would be righted and their enemies cast down" in the advent of the messianic age.<sup>50</sup> It was in the third century poet Commodianus' work that "the usual fantasies of vengeance and triumph suddenly crystallized into an urge to take up arms and fight."<sup>51</sup> It was not until the third and fourth centuries after Christianity had "attained a position of supremacy in the Mediterranean world and became the official religion of the Empire" that a general

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. "Isaiah 2:4."

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. "Isaiah 2:3; 11:10"; "Micah 4:2-3"; "Zechariah 14:9."

<sup>50</sup> Cohn, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

disapproval of messianic fervor was pronounced.<sup>52</sup> The Christians began to find credence in the belief that they were the Chosen People, inheritors of the Millennium, reinforced by the Book of Revelation. This notion held such appeal for the oppressed that it was difficult for the Church to control. However, it was through their association with the Empire that belief in the Second Coming was attached not only to Christ, but to the Emperor of the Last Days.<sup>53</sup> The Sibylline Oracles detailed the emergence of a “mighty Emperor, whom men had long thought to be dead [who] shakes off his slumber and rises up in his wrath.”<sup>54</sup> These prophecies were malleable, applicable to events in every age, and were vague enough that they could constantly be reinterpreted to fit contemporary conditions. It is with this evolving tradition that this research is most concerned, and it is in the return of the Emperor of the Last Days, a sibylline messianic figure, that a connection can be found between messianism and mahdism.

Islamic mahdism draws on aspects of both Christian and Jewish traditions. Similar to the Jewish *mashiach*, the Mahdi is principally a charismatic political figure that will create “a just social order and a world free from oppression in which the Islamic revelation will be the norm for all nations.”<sup>55</sup> Much of what is known regarding the Mahdi does not come directly from the Qu’ran, but from the Hadith, which are narrative accounts of the prophet Muhammad’s actions and proclamations. The Shi’a have a separate collection of hadiths, used in addition to the Sunni hadiths, and have therefore a markedly different interpretation of the Mahdi. The differences will be touched upon briefly here; however, it is beyond the scope of this research to discuss this topic in depth. From the Sunni hadiths we learn that the Mahdi will be from Muhammad’s family, his name will be the same as Muhammad’s, and his father’s name will be the same as the Prophet’s father’s (Abd Allah), he will have a distinct forehead and a prominently curved nose. He will restore justice and socio-economic equality. In Sunni Islam, the Mahdi is expected to restore Islam to its former integrity, acting as the “ultimate Caliph of the Prophet,” a temporal

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 30. The Emperor of the Last Days began to appear throughout the Sibylline books when Christians joined the Roman Empire. Many Roman Emperors had accrued divine status during their lifetime. As Christians joined forces with the Roman Empire, it is not surprising, that the Emperor emerged as the messianic King. This was especially true of Constantine who after his death was immortalized by the Sibyllines. These prophecies attached eschatological significance to Constantine’s character, creating the figure of the Emperor of the Last Days.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 32. The Sibylline Oracles are a collection of prophecies attributed to Sibyls, a prophetess. This collection proved invaluable for the development of early first millennium Jewish and Christian beliefs. The Sibylline prophecies continued to refer to one eschatological Savior, the warrior-Christ, as documented in the Book of Revelation.

<sup>55</sup> Sachedina, Abdulaziz Abdulhussein. *Islamic Messianism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981, p. 2

ruler that will strengthen Islam prior to the End Time.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the Shi'a, however, the Sunni do not believe in the continuous presentation of divine guidance over time. In Shi'a Islam similar to the Emperor of the Last Days found in the Sibylline prophecies, the twelfth Imam, whose disappearance in A.D. 873 resulted in the formation of a sect of Shi'a Islam was seen as "the messianic Imam [whose existence] became not only a basic tenet of the creed, but also the foundation on which the entire spiritual edifice rests."<sup>57</sup> The twelfth Imam was expected to eventually reappear at the end of time, "when there would be violent upheavals, plague and many other natural catastrophes, and most importantly, when there would occur a general defection from God and His religion."<sup>58</sup>

Any examination of the Mahdi would be remiss to disregard the influence of Sufism on both Sunni and Shi'a Islam. Particularly during the fourteenth/eighth and fifteenth/ninth centuries, Sufism was quite influential amongst the masses. Through admonition of its belief in "the possibility of immediate contact with God," Sufism "heightened the receptivity to apocalyptic and 'exaggerated' claims to mahdihood."<sup>59</sup> In Sufism, "salvation is attained by following the exemplary life of the spiritual guide, and not through adherence to an ethical code of conduct."<sup>60</sup> Many Sufi shaykhs were viewed as holy saviors, bestowing blessings and conferring legitimacy upon rulers in exchange for material support. One such shaykh, Mīr Qavām al-Dīn Mar'ashī, began his missionary activity in Tabaristān, located in Northern Iran, with the support of a local ruler. When this local ruler fell out of Sayyid Qavām al-Dīn's favor, they went to battle. The local population exalted Qavām al-Dīn's success, naming him as the new ruler. Soon followers flocked to join him, associating his order with militant elitism. "Religion emerged as a highly effective weapon for mobilizing masses for political action," in the Mar'ashī local state.<sup>61</sup> As a predominantly Sufi movement, the Mar'ashi state lacked the necessary Shi'ite conditioning to induce adherence to the Mahdi. However, it does offer one example of the motivating ideology Sufism offers to predominantly Shi'ite and Sunni sects. For

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Sachedina, Abdulaziz. "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam. *Studia Islamica*, 48(1978) p. 110.

<sup>59</sup> Arjomand, Said Amir. *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984. p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

this reason, many mahdist movements throughout history have a distinctly Sufi propensity attached to them.

As numerous authors have noted, messianic and mahdist traditions have offered many adherents the opportunity to rationalize their oppression and anticipate a time when they will inherit their rightful position in society.<sup>62</sup> In the subsequent sections, this research shall delve into four distinct groups that employed their religion's inherent messianic and/or mahdist ideology to justify their revolutionary tactics.

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<sup>62</sup> Authors such as Norman Cohn, Said Amir Arjomand, Abdulaziz Sachedina, Timothy Furnish, David Cook, William Tucker, etc.

### Section III – “It’s All Just a Little Bit of History Repeating”

#### The Anabaptist Madness at Münster

The Anabaptist movement at Münster is of particular interest due to the success it achieved from February 1534 until June 1535. It is one of the few movements to overthrow the government and establish a community based solely on religious ideals. Although relatively brief, the rebellion became a cautionary tale for many, securing the establishment of a pacifist branch led by Menno Simons, which eventually came to be known as the Mennonites.<sup>63</sup> However, most religious scholars associated with contemporary forms of Anabaptism continue to view the movement as illegitimate, a blasphemy of their doctrine.



Figure 1. Münster 1570.<sup>64</sup>

#### Origins and Doctrine

Little is known of the religion’s origins. Much of what has been recorded comes from openly antagonistic sources, desiring to invalidate the cause.<sup>65</sup> A gathering in Zurich, Switzerland in 1523 seems to have provided the genesis of a formalized movement, significantly expanding the Anabaptist faith.<sup>66</sup> Initially this sect was wholly religious, characterized by its emphasis on piety, distaste for state-mandated churches, and policies of nonviolence. As the movement’s influence grew, a schism formed along class lines regarding the issue of tithing, which the lower strata no longer wished to pay. The once purely religious movement became tinged with political and economic issues of the oppressed. Distinctions began to emerge between the Spirituals, comprised of the wealthy citizenry, and the Brethren, comprised of the lower strata.

<sup>63</sup> Stayer, John. *Anabaptists and the Sword*. Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1972. p: 284-321.

<sup>64</sup> Hogenberg, Remius, and Georg Braun. *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*. Vol I. 1572. This map depicts the city of Münster as seen by Remius Hogenberg in 1570. Available for reproduction due to expired copyright as specified by the United States copyright terms.

<sup>65</sup> The most offensive of these were *Der Widertäufer Ursprung, fürgang, Secten, wäsen, füneme and gemeine jrer leer Artckel* by Heinrich Bullinger published in 1651 and Christoph Andreas Fischer's *Von der Wiedertaufer verfluchtem Ursprung, gottlosen Lehre und derselben gründliche Widerlegung* of 1603.

<sup>66</sup> Bax, E. Belfort. *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903. p: 4

The Brethren began to resent the authoritative nature the faith had taken on. The Spirituals adapted many of the practices they had initially vowed against, such as tithing, only to find that many in the lower strata refused to relegate. As the Brethren's numbers swelled, the rejection of infant baptism became "a test-sign of adhesion."<sup>67</sup> On January 18, 1525 the Spirituals released a manifesto announcing the expulsion of all refusing infant baptisms from the city and its surrounding territories. In response to this manifesto, the Brethren leaders formally declared re-baptism as a duty for all members. The re-baptism of all Brethren members on January 21, 1525 served as the decisive split from the Protestant faith. In response, the Spirituals began persecuting the Brethren, securing the ties between the members. By June 5, 1525 leading members of the Council ruled that "the punishment for the re-baptizer was imprisonment and banishment, for the re-baptized a heavy pecuniary fine."<sup>68</sup> Following this ruling, two hundred local citizens were sworn in as constables to ensure the ruling's implementation. The Anabaptists were forced from Zurich; many dispersed throughout northern Switzerland and southern Germany, spreading their doctrine throughout the region for the next two years.

Different sects began to emerge as Anabaptists spread throughout the region. In 1531, Heinrich Bullinger, the Spirituals leader and head of the Zurich Church, remarked upon thirteen variations of the Anabaptist faith.

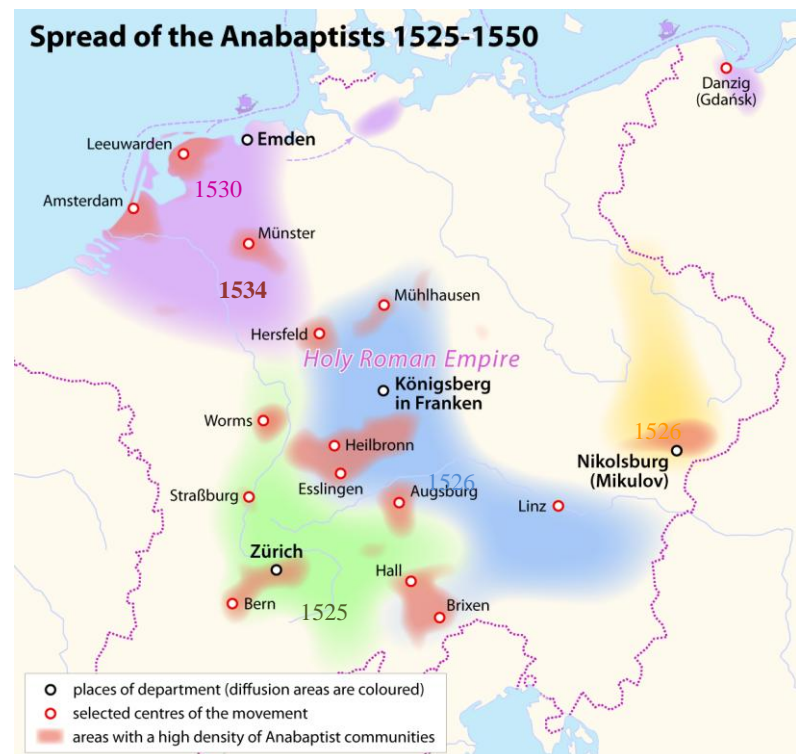


Figure 2. Spread of Anabaptists 1525-1550.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Adapted from Dörrbecker, Maximilian. *Spread of the Anabaptists 1525-1550*. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license available <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>.

Through an examination of these thirteen sects, he composed a list of 23 overlapping propositions common to most. Contemporary authors have attempted to categorize distinguishing characteristics of the Münster Melchiorites.<sup>70</sup> The following list represents a combination of both the characteristics common across Anabaptist sects and those unique to the sect functioning in Münster. The manifestation of these characteristics directly impacted the Melchiorites' ability to overtake the town and sustain a viable community.

Biblicism, or the literal interpretation of the Bible, served as the basis for much of the Anabaptist theology. The belief that through rebaptism an individual will be received into the Church forms the core of this theology. Throughout the New Testament, baptisms are received by adults, with full knowledge of the faith and "repentance for the remission of sins."<sup>71</sup> Through this textual interpretation, Anabaptists believed infant baptisms to be the work of the devil with rebaptism conceived of as the only true method of Christian baptism. However, this represented only one aspect of the movement's theology. In many ways, the movement's leaders, Jan Matthys and Jan Bockelson, legitimated much of their actions through Biblicism, and although many of these beliefs did not have any negative impact on the community at large, they did serve as a form of social control. Examples of such policies include the belief in communal property, which was specifically implemented by the Anabaptists present in Münster, substantiated by verses 32-37 of Acts 4. The justification for polygamy also originated with the Old Testament patriarchs.<sup>72</sup> By relying on their followers' belief in the Bible, Bockelson and Matthys enforced many of their policies with divine authority, ensuring that no one could speak out against them.

Resistance to secular authority is a substantive characteristic of all Anabaptist sects; however, it took on new meaning for the Münster Melchiorites. For the Anabaptists, the belief that both Protestants and Catholics excessively relied on secular authority tainted many of their pronouncements. In general, many Anabaptist sects believed secular authority should be treated

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<sup>70</sup> So called because the movement was founded by Melchior Hoffman.

<sup>71</sup> "Gospel of Mark 1:4." *New American Bible*. Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict, 2011. Although the Anabaptists specifically cited examples of adult baptisms in the Bible to justify their claims passages such as Luke 18:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16; Acts 11:13b, 14; Acts 10:48a clearly refers to entire families, and presumably infants being baptized as well. An in-depth examination of the development of infant baptism in the Catholic Church and the opposition to this by groups such as the Anabaptists is beyond the scope of this analysis. For more information on this topic refer to Everett Ferguson's *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*.

<sup>72</sup> Examples of polygamy in the Old Testament can be found in Exodus 21:10; 2 Samuel 5:13; 1 Chronicles 3:1-9, 14:3; 1 Kings 11:3; 2 Chronicles 11:21; and Deuteronomy 21:15.

with a mixture of submission and endurance.<sup>73</sup> Building upon the inherent distrust followers had of the acting secular authorities, Matthys and Bockelson were able to justify the ensuing violence in a very deliberate way.

In many ways the notion of exclusivity is intimately linked to Biblicism and distrust of the secular authorities. Through continued persecution and distinguishing rituals the Anabaptists, like many other messianic movements, established an exclusivity that prevented non-members from participating. Key components of the Anabaptist theology served to isolate and segregate members of the faith from outsiders. The core of this theology revolved around the belief that they were the true Church of Christ, the refusal to acknowledge other Churches or recognize their ministers, and the guiding principle that individuals could be saved only through rebaptism, thus excluding all other individuals from receiving the Sacraments or participating in the breaking of the bread. This elitist foundation often serves to empower members of an isolated community, but can also segregate members even further from society. This segregation often initiates feelings of prejudice against the so-called ‘other’, easing the transition to violence.

Inspirationalism, or at least the belief in divine inspiration, represents a key component of messianic movements, particularly those active during the Reformation.<sup>74</sup> The notion of divine inspiration could easily fit within the notion of Biblicism in Anabaptist thought; however, it played such a critical role in the expansion of the Anabaptist movement and in the establishment of the Anabaptist leaders in Münster that it has been included as a separate characteristic. The established Church during the Middle Ages and Reformation did what it could to suppress divinely inspired lay prophets. In spite of their efforts, these charismatic “prophets” often emerged to establish their own followings. The Anabaptists in particular believed that every individual who feels the call from God to preach should do so. Justifications for such actions were found in the Bible, passages where lay men received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” and found themselves to be receivers of a divine message.<sup>75</sup> This common belief increased the population’s receptivity to lay prophets, creating an environment where the charismatic authority could easily gain an effective following.

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<sup>73</sup> Bullinger, Heinrich. *Sermons on the Sacraments*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1811.

<sup>74</sup> The term “inspirationalism” was specifically coined by Hermann von Kerssenbrock to describe the Melchiorites belief in divine inspiration. Although this could also be referred to as “spiritualism,” Kerssenbrock notes that this term has irrelevant associations. For more information on this topic refer to Hermann von Kerssenbrock’s *Narrative of the Anabaptist Madness* p. 19.

<sup>75</sup> Acts 2:1-21; 2:38 are both prime examples where God speaks directly to common individuals.



Messianism acted as a significant motivating force as well. Unique to the Münster Melchiorites was the belief that they would play a key role in ushering in the Second Coming of Christ. This belief was not common amongst Anabaptists who, in general, were of the mindset that they should suffer through submission and endure this life until the next. The transition from quietist to revolutionary is an interesting one and something that will be examined in greater depth in the subsequent analysis.

### **Establishing a Revolutionary Ideology**

The impact of persecutions during the period from 1525 to 1530 limited the spread of the Anabaptist theology to the Moravian territories. These territories proved more tolerant to the Anabaptist cause, not out of sympathy, but indifference.<sup>76</sup> Regardless, this allowed the Anabaptists to seek refuge in the territory. The individual who instigated the relocation was a gentleman by the name of Melchior Hoffmann. Unique to Hoffmann's preaching was the particular attention to the signs of the approaching end times. Upon his arrival in Strasburg around 1530, Hoffmann openly deviated from the traditional Anabaptist doctrine of non-resistance, believing that it was imperative to act against secular authority.<sup>77</sup> Due largely to their proximity to Hoffmann, many of the new Anabaptist movements established throughout the northwest, along the Lower Rhine, and the adjacent Westphalia districts, came to believe that the doctrine of non-resistance would be renounced upon the coming of the Lord, as they, the true believers, would be called to rise up against the secular leaders and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. These followers soon received the moniker of Melchiorites.

Outwardly, many of the Melchiorite communities behaved as the traditional Anabaptists in southern Germany did; however, in what could be construed as a precursor to the later upheaval Hoffmann was named as the prophet Elijah. He proclaimed the year 1533 as "the date that would see the coming of the Lord, and the inauguration of the reign of the saints."<sup>78</sup> As the prophet's popularity grew, excitement in Strasburg increased as well, leading secular authorities to fear an uprising. The authorities acted quickly, imprisoning Hoffmann in an effort to quell any unrest. Hoffmann firmly believed his imprisonment to be a sign of the impending Second Coming. Hoffmann expected that he would be imprisoned for six months, after which time he

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<sup>76</sup> The Moravian territories proved more tolerant than Switzerland, Latvia, Sweden, and Denmark. These areas were targeting and banning Anabaptists.

<sup>77</sup> Bax, E. Belfort. *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903. p: 104

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

would be freed by the coming Savior. Despite these theories, Hoffmann remained in prison for the next ten years until his death.

As 1533 came to a close, many Anabaptists began to believe that the Lord had rejected Strasburg due to the citizenry's widespread disbelief in the Anabaptist tenets. The overwhelming popularity of Anabaptist doctrine in the Westphalia region, and particularly the City of Münster, led many to believe that Münster not Strasburg would become the site of the future Kingdom of God. As followers awaited the Second Coming, Hoffmann's doctrine continued to spread across the Lower Rhine and into the Netherlands. It was from this region that the future leader of the Münster Rebellion, Jan Matthys, emerged. Matthys was originally a baker in Haarlem prior to his own conversion by Melchior Hoffman. Matthys quickly rose through the ranks of Anabaptists, becoming a prominent leader following Hoffman's imprisonment. Matthys took Hoffmann's revolutionary ideology one step further, pushing it to the doctrinal forefront and requiring revolutionary action as a religious duty.<sup>79</sup> Matthys' enthusiasm fit with the region's prevailing thoughts on salvation, in which individuals could be saved through their own actions. This notion combined with the disturbance in local economic conditions, the rise of a capitalistic system, and the despair that immediately followed the Peasant Revolts of 1525 created an atmosphere ripe for revolution. Among his closest followers, and his eventual successor, was Jan Bockelson from Leyden. Bockelson was the illegitimate son of a local merchant and a peasant woman. He received little schooling in his youth, studying to be a tailor instead. By the age of 25, Bockelson had gone bankrupt, refocusing his efforts on theology, specifically studying Thomas Münzer and Jan Matthys' writings. The influence held by each of these theologians on their contemporaries is important to note, precisely because it is through this revolutionary rethinking that a seemingly pacifist religious sect underwent such a violent transformation.

### **Brief History of Münster**

It is widely acknowledged that the revolution at Münster occurred for reasons beyond simple religious zeal.<sup>80</sup> In fact, according to a letter written to Martin Luther by one of his associates, Melancthon, in August of 1530, the Imperial Cities "care not for religion, for their endeavor is only toward domination and freedom."<sup>81</sup> For this reason it is important to provide the historical

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.112.

<sup>80</sup> For a further discussion of this topic please refer to E. Belfort Bax, Hermann von Kerssenbrock, and Norman Housely.

<sup>81</sup> Bax, p. 117.

context associated with the rebellion to ensure that not only the religious elements, but also the political, economic, and social elements are described as well. It is first imperative to understand Münster as it existed prior to the rebellion.

Münster was the principal town of Westphalia, which was approximately half of its present size in area. In the 1500s, Westphalia was divided between the upper and the lower dioceses, separated by the town of Fecklenburg. Charles V, then an important actor in the region, founded the diocese. As such, the Bishop was both a prince of the Empire and “one of the most important magnates of northwestern Germany.”<sup>82</sup> However, in all ecclesiastical matters his authority was surpassed by the Archbishop of Köln.

Unrest had been simmering within Münster for quite some time due to economic hardship, among other issues. The first upheaval was suppressed in 1526 by the local religious authorities. An attempt was made to revive the movement in 1527, but failed to gain momentum. However, the increase in famine and the spread of disease in 1529 triggered the revolutionary spirit within the community once more. In the fall of 1529 the English sweating sickness broke out over Westphalia, killing approximately ninety four percent of infected individuals.<sup>83</sup> The harvest itself proved an exceptional hardship as well, especially with the impending inflation of the local economy.<sup>84</sup> The threatening Turkish invasion resulted in a Turks’ Tax imposed on the local citizenry. In some cases the tax was almost ten percent of the citizens’ total income. These issues occurred in conjunction with the emergence of Bernhardt Rothmann, a radical preacher who inspired many of the lower class citizenry with his views on the Reformation.

Upon his arrival, Rothmann quickly became involved with the local reforming party and began preaching heretical doctrine. Over the next few years, Rothmann was removed and reinstated multiple times. Even though the Bishop issued a mandate effectively banning Rothmann from the township, Rothmann had obtained influence among town leaders and had become an untouchable figure. He broke completely from the church in February of 1532. By the following month, he had become the first Evangelical preacher of a parish built out of

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

<sup>83</sup> According to Hecker’s *Epidemics of the Middle Ages*, the English sweating sickness “was a violent inflammatory fever, which after a short rigor, prostrated the powers as with a blow, and amidst painful oppression at the stomach, headache, and lethargic stupor, suffused the whole body with a foetid perspiration. In neighboring Dortmund, 470 succumbed of the 500 infected.” p. 181.

<sup>84</sup> In 1529, the price of a bushel of rye rose from three and a half German shillings to nine shillings. By the following year due to an unsuccessful harvest, the price of barley rose to fourteen shillings per bushel. Bax p. 119.

municipal funds. That he was able to influence the town in the building of an Evangelical church simply shows the extent of his authority. Aggravated by the recent developments, the Prince-Bishop Friedrich abdicated his title, ushering in a new, moderate Prince-Bishop named Erick of Osnabrück on 27 March 1532. The tactic succeeded, and many moderates who had formerly sided with the preacher began to switch alliances in support of the Prince-Bishop. More than anything this demonstrates the moderates' reluctance to align themselves with the radicals. At every opportunity the moderates chose to align themselves with what they considered to be the lesser of two evils. The new ecclesiastical government took strides to reign in Rothmann and his extremist followers by limiting his preaching; however, many of Rothmann's followers vocally refuted this effort, stating their intent to stand by Rothmann at all costs.<sup>85</sup> Through the promise of moderate reforms in the local Church, the Prince-Bishop was able to stall Rothmann's progress and limit his appeal. However, in May the Prince-Bishop died, leaving an opening that, when filled, would have an enormous impact on the later events of 1534.

The Prince-Bishop's successor, Franz von Waldeck, was severe in his religious views, working very closely with the Archbishop of Köln. The promise of moderate reform vanished, leaving the local moderates no choice but to once again align with Rothmann and the extremists. The effect of such an alliance is best viewed in the events that took place during July 1532. Rothmann's followers demanded that all parochial churches be handed over to Protestant preachers, and the Parliamentary Council, known as the Rath, complied out of fear. By August, Münster had, for all intents and purposes, become a Protestant town. This infuriated the Prince-Bishop who issued a mandate summoning the town to order. When the citizenry did not comply, he went so far as to make a call for arms and assistance throughout the region. The ecclesiastical ministers began sequestering goods and indicting leaders of the reforming movement. The locals, not to be deterred, requested armor and weapons from the Rath to defend themselves. The Prince-Bishop, realizing that he was at a disadvantage, entered negotiations shortly thereafter. On Christmas night, approximately one thousand armed citizens of the town guard occupied Münster with very little resistance. The Prince-Bishop found himself obliged to sign a charter formally declaring Münster Protestant.

Many of the surrounding communities also succeeded in attaining a formal conversion to Protestantism. The historian E. Belfort Bax describes the common characteristics of such

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<sup>85</sup> Bax, p. 126.

movements. He observes that many of these movements were established by the lower strata who formed a committee of public safety in opposition to the Rath. These committees were, for the most part, quite successful at seizing power, making the aristocrats' positions somewhat obsolete.<sup>86</sup> These movements, though often cloaked in religious discontent, were primarily a means of rectifying socio-economic inequalities.

Following the treaty established in Münster on 14 February 1533, the town became a safe haven for radicals from the surrounding region. In fact, even before this date preachers such as Heinrich Roll (a.k.a. Wassenberg) sought refuge in Münster prior to his expulsion from Jülich in 1532 for radical beliefs. Wassenberg was firmly opposed to infant baptism, and it is shortly after his arrival that doctrines closely aligned to Anabaptist teachings begin to grab hold of Rothmann and his followers. These newly immigrated radicals provided a firm framework prepared to embrace many of the ideas brought forth in the fall of 1533 by two of Matthys' followers. A particularly telling example of the power gained by the radicals is the arrest and subsequent release of Johann Schroeder. On 8 September 1533, Schroeder was detained for openly proclaiming Anabaptist doctrines on the steps of St. Lamberti church. One week later, the Smiths Guild, to which Schroeder was a member, demanded his release. The Rath, fearing an uprising, submitted to the demands and released Schroeder. Upon seeing the powerlessness of local authorities, many of the previously banished radical preachers returned without retaliation.

Jan Matthys, a prominent leader among the Anabaptists, formally declared Münster the New Jerusalem, where the Anabaptists would reign unbounded by earthly laws and authority. He sent his most trusted disciples to establish Anabaptist theology in Münster prior to his arrival. On 5 January 1534 two of Jan Matthys' apostles arrived in Münster, confiding in the locals that they were sent to usher in the new millennium. They said "God had revealed to his prophet that it was by means of the elect themselves, acting as his instruments, that his kingdom should be established."<sup>87</sup> Following their arrival, rebaptism became extremely popular among the citizens of Münster. Much of the groundwork for the Anabaptist cause had already been laid by the time Jan Bockelson arrived on 13 January. As a result, he immediately set out to intimate himself with local leaders, including Rothmann and Wassenberg, as well as a wealthy cloth-merchant,

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

Bernhardt Knipperdollinck, whose daughter he ultimately married. After a few months, Bockelson appealed to Matthys to come to Münster.

The Anabaptists' level of success in Münster highlights the inability of the local authorities to immobilize the movement. The governing body did attempt to reign in the citizenry, and successfully expelled the Anabaptist preachers on 15 January 1534. However, the radical preachers were met outside the gates by their followers and quickly ushered into a separate gate without difficulty. The governing body, through repeated inaction, became somewhat obsolete, allowing strong, charismatic personalities to take hold. Münster authorities promptly appealed to the Bishop who issued an edict requiring the Anabaptist radicals removed from the town and banned from the Empire. However, once again the edict did not carry much weight, and did not deter members of the Anabaptist community from practicing their faith.

### **Anabaptist Rising**

It was not until 8 February 1534 that five hundred armed Anabaptists appeared in the marketplace, attempting to seize the city. The Evangelicals and Catholics stood together to fight off the Anabaptist rebels. They dispatched an urgent message to the Prince-Bishop requesting assistance. More than anything, the Evangelicals feared that the cavalry would not only halt the Anabaptist movement, but reforming movements altogether. The Anabaptists had won a great deal of ground. When they learned of the cavalry's arrival the Anabaptists quickly entered negotiations with Bürgermeister, Tylbeck, who was known to sympathize with their plight. Through the course of the negotiations, Tylbeck and the Anabaptists agreed that religious freedom should be strictly maintained, but with an understanding that in all secular affairs the local authority should be obeyed. Tylbeck sent word to the Prince-Bishop that the matter could be handled internally, in hopes of maintaining the possibility of religious freedom. Shortly after amnesty was reached, Rothmann, at Knipperdollinck's request, sent a letter to the surrounding communities relaying information that a prophet had travelled to Münster and was inviting interested individuals to journey to the city. Immigrants began to flock to the city to live with God's prophet. The foreigners quickly outnumbered "the genuine burgher population, which was being daily diminished by withdrawals."<sup>88</sup> Fearing the worst, local authorities fled the city, leaving it open for the Anabaptists to begin legitimizing their growing influence. On 28

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 159.

February 1534 the Anabaptists formally elected an entirely new Council and officers to serve the city.

The Anabaptists broke not only with the previous authority, but with all historical artifacts as well. They went so far as to destroy churches, paintings, charters, and books during the period of 15 to 23 March 1534. A decree was issued requiring all citizens to submit to rebaptism or evacuate. From this point forward, the Anabaptist prophets established regulations to ensure the community aligned with their interpretation of the formal Anabaptist theology, beginning with communal property. The transition emerged in stages, first monetarily through the request for gold and silver. It was by no means “required”; however, all who refused became prospects for expulsion. Next came the establishment of communal food. In order to enforce these new rules, three deacons were appointed to each parish. These deacons would go to each house in their district, confiscating provisions as required to feed the poor. Confiscation of food soon led to common meals, open for all citizens to attend. During the summer of 1534 approximately “ten to twelve hundred oxen were consumed, together with a quantity of other meat, butter and cheese, besides codfish and herring.”<sup>89</sup>

The Prince-Bishop continued the fight to overcome the radicals and retake the town. Believing Jan Matthys key to the radicals’ success, the Prince-Bishop focused his attention on removing Matthys from the fight. Matthys led twenty men to battle the Prince-Bishop’s men camped outside the city walls. He was soon overpowered, killed, and beheaded. Quite unexpectedly, the city did not fall into chaos immediately following Matthys’ demise. The Prince-Bishop consistently underestimated the Anabaptists. Matthys had included Jan Bockelson, his second in command, in many of the major decisions. As a result, Bockelson quickly emerged as the new prophet. As the new leading authority, Bockelson set out to personalize the town’s rules and regulations. Both Norman Cohn and E. Belfort Bax agree that Bockelson was more of a politician than Matthys had been. He was a gifted speaker and knew how to evoke great emotion from members of the community.<sup>90</sup> It was through these two gifts that Bockelson set about reforming the governing body to align it with the religious ruling bodies found in the Old Testament, and ridding the government of Matthys’ inner circle, who posed an immediate threat to his new policies. Bockelson appointed twelve “elders,” consisting of the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 186.

<sup>90</sup> Cohn references Bockelson’s oratory abilities in *Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 268. E. Belfort Bax references these same abilities in *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* p, 198.

most influential men of the community.<sup>91</sup> As they were divinely appointed by the direction of God through the prophet, these men were given what Bockelson referred to as the “sword of justice,” bestowing them with power over both life and death.<sup>92</sup> Bockelson established thirty-one articles set forth through an edict allegedly inspired by God as means of controlling the population. These articles included provisions for everything from the type of clothing to be worn by all members of the community, to the establishment of a military department with all church steeples to be melted down for use by the department. Of these thirty-one articles, E. Belfort Bax highlights five:

“Each shall perform his allotted task with diligence, shall fear God and the authority set over him, for it beareth not the sword in vain, but is the avenger of evil deeds. All things which the elders determine, the prophet Jan [Bockelson] of Leyden shall, as the true servant of the Almighty and of his holy authority, proclaim to the congregation. Bernhardt Knipperdollinck shall be the guardian of the public order and the magistrate to whom is entrusted the carrying out of the decisions by the elders. To this end he shall be accompanied by four attendants in arms.”<sup>93</sup>

As they were to live by the word of the Bible, the elders began to interpret and adapt their lifestyle to account for such changes. The elders began practicing polygamy, justified by reference to the Old Testament. Sexual behavior was strictly regulated in the beginning, sex being permitted only for married couples. Both Bax and Karl Kautsky argue that the elders instituted this practice out of necessity due to the overabundance of females within the city walls.<sup>94</sup> The number of unmarried and widowed women continued to grow, leaving many women without the protection of a man. In this way the Anabaptists made an effort to provide for and protect the women within the town. The new doctrine was formally put into practice by August with each community leader taking three wives in accordance with the new regulation. The Council also established six schools throughout the township to educate the children on the Anabaptist teachings and the prophet’s edicts. What is perhaps most interesting regarding this newly established stipulation is the backlash that followed the announcement. On 30 July, one week after the edict, an armed uprising against the prophet and his elders occurred. These rebels were quickly defeated and imprisoned. Scholars have called into question the event’s true significance. Cohn argues the insurrection represented backlash specifically against the new

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<sup>91</sup> This provided Bockelson with the opportunity to rid the elected officials that were devoted to Matthys alone. Through divine inspiration he convinced the community this was God’s will.

<sup>92</sup> Bax, p. 199.

<sup>93</sup> Bax, p. 199.

<sup>94</sup> Conversely, Norman Cohn argues “there is no evidence to support the view that Bockelson’s intention was to provide protectors for otherwise defenceless women.” p. 269.



doctrine;<sup>95</sup> however, Bax and Kautsky believe this new doctrine provided the perfect opportunity for a group of Prince-Bishop sympathizers to exploit the upheaval in an attempt to oust the prophet and retake the town.<sup>96</sup> Even though the rebels' true intentions will probably never be truly understood, the group was quite small and easily overpowered before being put to death. This punishment served as an example to the rest of the community. The Anabaptist leadership was extremely strict, enforcing compliance among the citizenry by fear of death. Bockelson's meticulous imposition of punishments instituted a level of fear that effectively controlled the population.

Throughout this time there were continual attacks against the Münsterites by the Prince-Bishop and his men situated outside the city walls. With every citizen in tow, the townsfolk were able to defeat them. The prophet, Jan of Leyden, used these occasions to stress the assistance God provided to the Münsterites, without which they would not have defeated such an advanced military force. The occasions of his success provided the prophet and his elders with ample evidence of their good grace with the Lord. It was following such a battle at the end of August 1534 that Bockelson used such a victory to have himself declared King of Münster.

In early September a preacher, who had recently attained the status of prophet, proclaimed that he had received a message from God identifying Bockelson as the king of the whole world. Bockelson seized the opportunity, dissolving the board of town elders and confiscating the "sword of justice." As Kautsky notes, the position of executioner, as signified by the sword of justice, was the basest. By taking this position, Bockelson was depicting himself as the servant of the town, the embodiment of the New Testament's assertion that the last shall be first and the first last. Bockelson provided each of the elders with a new position in the royal court. Bockelson took every measure to ensure his court was perceived as the height of sophistication. Whenever in public, he would appear accompanied by members of the court, splendidly dressed in the finest robes, and adorned with one of his two gold crowns. Many historians have described this transition as the height of Anabaptist hypocrisy; however, Bax maintains the falsity of this claim. In fact, Bax believes this could have been an attempt by

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.269. Cohn states that "polygamy met with resistance when it was first introduced. There was an armed rising during which Bockelson, Knipperdollinck and the preachers were thrown into prison."

<sup>96</sup> Bax, p. 208.

Bockelson to inspire confidence in his government and provide hope within a community that had begun to feel the effects of isolation.<sup>97</sup>

More often than not, prophets became the ambassadors of change, describing God's stipulations for the community. One such divine revelation yielded a strict policy on the number of items of clothing allowed the general population. This regulation required men to have one coat, two hose, two doublets, and three shirts; women were allowed one skirt, one mantle, and four chemises; and houses were rationed one bed and four sheets. The deacons strictly enforced the command, travelling to each house in the city walls to ensure compliance upon threat of death. Supplies became increasingly scant, and frequent searches were required to guarantee that personal property and provisions were not being concealed from the community.

The Prince-Bishop had successfully isolated the town, so much so that by April of 1535 famine was widespread. Once every animal within the city limits was killed and eaten, the townsfolk began to consume "grass and moss, old shoes, and the whitewash on the walls, as well as the bodies of the dead."<sup>98</sup> By May, Bockelson finally agreed to allow discontented members of the community to leave. As the fugitives fled the city limits they were captured by the Prince-Bishop's men. All able-bodied men were promptly put to death. The Prince-Bishop could not determine what to do with the elderly, women, and children for fear they would rile up the surrounding communities if set free. Ultimately, the Prince-Bishop determined it would be safest to leave the women and children in a field outside of the Münster gates. After conferring with his allies, the Prince-Bishop ordered all survivors considered fiercely loyal to the Anabaptist cause to be executed, and the remaining Münsterites were sent to villages on the outliers of the diocese.

The Prince-Bishop began an information campaign, releasing pamphlets into the town "offering an amnesty and safe conduct to the inhabitants if only they would hand over the king and his court."<sup>99</sup> Bockelson, for fear of mutiny, established twelve districts and appointed dukes to monitor each district. These dukes were generally made up of foreigners without direct ties to the community. Meetings of multiple citizens were strictly prohibited, and any man found to be plotting against the king was beheaded. It was not until 24 May 1535 that four men attempting to escape Münster inadvertently brought about the city's demise. A guildsman named Heinrich

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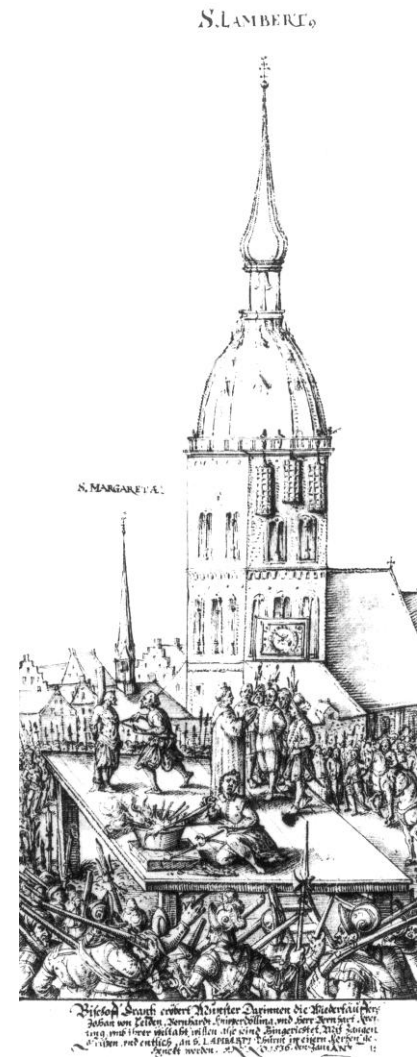
<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>98</sup> Cohn, p. 278.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 279.

Gresbeck was caught by the Bishop's men and forced to surrender. In exchange for his life, he reported the "weakest gates and least defensible points in the walls."<sup>100</sup> On 24 June 1535 four hundred soldiers launched a surprise attack using Gresbeck's intelligence. After hours of fighting, the surviving Anabaptists surrendered and returned to their homes with a promise of safe conduct. The Bishop's men began to exterminate the Anabaptists by going door to door in a massacre that lasted for several days. The survivors were tried in court. The women were told to recant their faith or face banishment. Of those who refused to recant, many of the steadfast were executed, including Bockelson's wife. All men who were in high standing within the former regime were also beheaded.

The Anabaptist leaders perished. In accordance with the Bishop's command, Bockelson was led about on a chain throughout the city. In January 1536, he along with Knipperdollinck and one other leading Anabaptist were brought to Münster, publicly tortured to death with red hot irons, and hung in cages from the Lamberti church-tower in the center of town. Surviving Anabaptists split into three



**Figure 3. Execution of Anabaptists.<sup>101</sup>**

main groups. The first group sought refuge with the duke of Oldenbourg, one of Bishop Franz's opponents, plotting their return to power through a violent takeover. The second group followed Jan van Batenburg, largely functioning in the Netherland region, eventually turning to murder and plundering to survive. The final group believed that the events of Münster were unacceptable, and determined that a pacifist course was more appropriate. These survivors followed Obbe Philips and his disciple Menno Simons, eventually founding the Mennonites. Fugitives that did manage to escape "are said to have come over to England" shortly after which

<sup>100</sup> Bax, p. 304.

<sup>101</sup> Berger, Georg. "Westfälische Kunststätten: Rathaus und Friedenssaal zu Münster," Seite 28. 1607. This image is available in the public domain according to the United States copyright terms due to copyright expiration.

“Anabaptism first came into prominent notice.”<sup>102</sup> Throughout the remainder of the sixteenth century, militant Anabaptism would overrun Westphalia from time to time, only to be countered with severe military repercussions. It was not until 1574 that one of the original Münster fugitives who had escaped into the territories of the Duke of Cleves proclaimed himself the new King of Zion, following Bockelson’s doctrine quite closely including the practice of both communism and polygamy. For the next five years he successfully evaded authorities and his three thousand followers devastated Westphalia, until March of 1580 when he was burnt alive.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

From the establishment of Anabaptism, two currents have existed: the traditional, pacifist form, and the politicized, militant mode. When Anabaptism first emerged it was the pacifist form which prevailed, with members believing that their oppression would be relieved at the end of time. However, as the persecution against them grew the militant sect began to gain momentum. This militant mode predominated as Matthys and Bockelson gained power throughout the northwestern region. The fall of Münster provided the pacifist sect with the impetus it needed to reemerge and regain its original momentum. In this form, Anabaptism has survived to the present day in communities such as the Mennonites, the Brethren, and influenced movements such as the Baptists and the Quakers.

Münster became a cautionary tale for the region at large. In fact, the losses felt by the Münster community, and the sheer amount of bloodshed that ensued “helped to stabilize the rule of the restored civic elite and the position of the Catholic Church.”<sup>103</sup> Many of the existing reforming movements began to realize the importance of codifying their teachings, and creating a distinct, separate establishment. It is not a coincidence that “Luther did not trouble to draft a liturgical rite for ordaining clergy until 1535, the year of the Münster siege.”<sup>104</sup> By 1538, many parishes also began to keep a register to monitor all baptisms, funerals, and marriages. One of the primary incentives of such a program was the ability to monitor families who were not baptizing their children in opposition to infant baptism. The Münster rebellion changed the face of messianic beliefs, making many individuals reluctant to participate in such factions.

Upon further reflection on the events in Münster from 1533 to 1535, there are a few recurring themes to comment upon. First, and foremost, is the recurring trend of permissive

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 321.

<sup>103</sup> Hsia, R. Po-chia. *Society and Religion in Munster 1535-1618*. London: Yale University Press, 1984. p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *The Reformation*. New York: Viking, 2003. p. 206.

authority. The local authorities had multiple opportunities to regulate the Anabaptist movement, had they been resolute enough to enforce their mandates. By overlooking the activities of local charismatic leaders, the local authorities essentially made themselves obsolete. This leads directly to a second feature, the charismatic leader. In Münster, Rothmann, Matthys, and Bockelson all acted as charismatic authorities at various points. Rothmann was an extremely adept speaker, and by continually refuting the local authorities, he made the community vulnerable to outside influence, namely in the form of Matthys and Bockelson. Bockelson had a great deal of authority in the community, realizing that meticulously strict adherence to regulations is vital to controlling a population. Each of these men had their own priorities and style; however, they were all capable of mobilizing people to align with, and even die for, their regime. A third motivating factor was the widespread social and economic discontent. Conditions during the Reformation were ever-changing. As Friedrich Lütge points out, “the considerable depopulation of the country [as a result of the Black Death], a decline in landed rents and the position of the nobility, the rise of the towns and the burgher element, rising prices for commercial products, and the consequent growth of a price situation unfavorable to agriculture – all these implied a violent break after the preceding centuries.”<sup>105</sup> There was also the mass persecution felt by the Anabaptist community, which rather than creating a culture of fear, served as a unifying factor, bringing the Anabaptist community closer together. These persecutions also influenced the progression of Anabaptist teachings, specifically through Melchior Hoffmann, whose teachings formed the basis of militant Anabaptism. It was however the antinomianism and militant elitism proclaimed by the charismatic authorities that permitted the common man to transition towards violence. Each of these factors had a significant impact on the events at Münster, and more than a few of these also influenced the Savonarolan movement in Florence, Italy from 1494 until 1498.

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<sup>105</sup> Lütge, Friedrich. “Economic Change.” *The New Cambridge Modern History Volume II: The Reformation 1520-1559*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1958. p. 29.

## Savonarola Movement

Declared a heretic by the Catholic Church and a prophet by the Savonarolans, or Piagnoni,<sup>106</sup> Girolamo Savonarola has been studied with a mixture of fascination and repugnance throughout the last century. As Donald Weinstein so precisely states in his article “Hagiography, Demonology, Biography: Savonarola Studies Today” the continuing fascination with Savonarola is “due not only to his charismatic personality and his prophetic vision, remarkable as they were, but also to his connection to some of the major crises of this time: the struggle to restore the Florentine republic, the occupation of Italy by foreign powers, and the storm over the Renaissance Church.”<sup>107</sup> The first generations of Piagnoni believed Savonarola’s death to be in line with the events foretold of the coming apocalypse. They established a cult focused on interpreting Savonarola’s prophecies and their fulfillment. Followers of Savonarolan millenarianism were in the forefront of the revolt of 1527-1530 to overthrow Medici rule. Many early Protestants saw Savonarola as an “early martyr for Church reform, if not a forerunner of evangelical theology.”<sup>108</sup> Some saw him as a savior, many as a heretic; regardless, Savonarola’s impact on Florentine history cannot be argued.

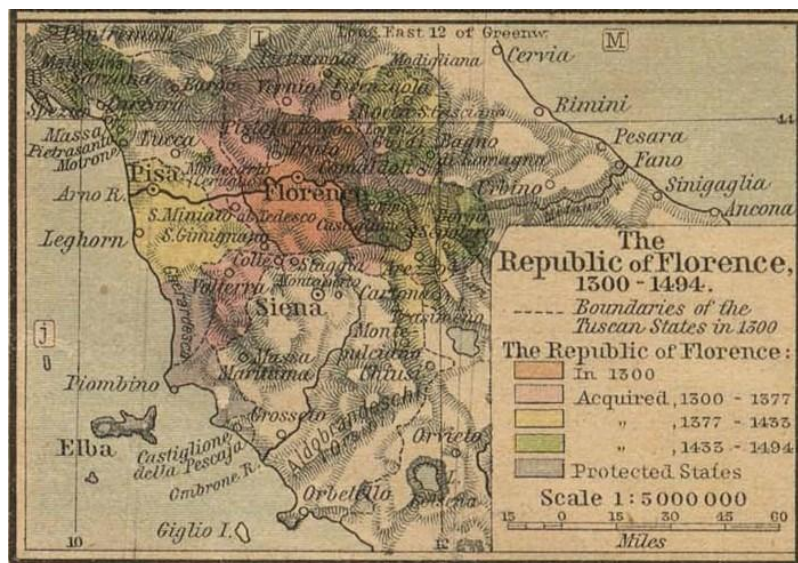


Figure 4. The Republic of Florence 1300-1494.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> As described by Donald Weinstein in *Savonarola and Florence* a “Piagnone” was at first the abusive term used to describe a follower of Savonarola. Loosely translated as the “Wailers,” it has become the most widely used name for the friar’s devotees, without pejorative intent.

<sup>107</sup> Weinstein, Donald. “Hagiography, Demonology, Biography: Savonarola Studies Today.” *The Journal of Modern History* 63.3 (1991): 483.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 483.

<sup>109</sup> Shepherd, William R. *Historical Atlas*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923. Map supplied Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

## Origins and Doctrine

As discussed in the introduction to this work, Christian messianism was not a new concept, especially to Italy. It has been suggested that although Savonarola developed a unique version of messianism, he was perhaps influenced to some degree by Joachim of Fiore and his revelation of the New Age of the Spirit. Joachim believed he could interpret Scripture to forecast the future. He saw, through the Scriptures, that history was “an ascent through three successive stages, each of them presided over by one of the Persons of the Trinity.”<sup>110</sup> The first age was that of the Father, marked by fear. The second age was that of the Son, marked by faith and submission. The third age, however, was that of the Spirit, and would be one “of love, joy and freedom, when the knowledge of God would be revealed directly in the hearts of all men.”<sup>111</sup> This final stage would persist until the Day of Judgment. Between each stage, Joachim predicted a period of incubation, lasting forty-two generations, which placed the beginning of the third age between the years 1200 and 1260.

In order to prepare the way for the third age, a band of monks was sent to convert the Jews and “lead all mankind away from the love of earthly things and towards the love of the things of the spirit.”<sup>112</sup> The period immediately preceding the third age would be marked by the appearance of the Antichrist, who would rule in the form of a secular king, reprimanding the corrupt Church until it was destroyed. The Franciscan Order came to champion Joachim’s ideology, rejecting all worldly possessions. Following Joachim’s death, a group of radicals broke away from the Order and began editing Joachim’s writings, providing commentaries on them, and even forging prophecies based on his text that came to be more influential than the original text itself. It was through these radicals that “Joachite and pseudo-Joachite writings and ideas stimulated the apocalyptic imagination everywhere in Europe well into the Reformation and beyond.”<sup>113</sup>

It is important to note the extreme influence such prophecies had on the citizenry and cleric alike. The style of preaching so popular in Italy during the fifteenth century had a direct influence on Savonarola as well. For this reason it is imperative to mention these preachers and their beliefs. Throughout the fifteenth century, particularly in Florence, common citizens often

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<sup>110</sup> Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970. p. 108.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>113</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 92.

expressed their faith as a community through charity, sermons, and even theological debates.<sup>114</sup> Every year during the Advent and Lent seasons, preachers throughout the region were invited to deliver sermons. Of the invited preachers, there were a few favorites, “especially the Franciscan San Bernardino of Siena, whose fiery sermons against sodomy and bonfires of vanities in the 1420s anticipated Savonarola’s.”<sup>115</sup> There were others as well, such as “Bernardino da Feltre, who was expelled from Florence in 1488 for his provocative sermons against the Jews; and also the Augustinian friar, Mariano da Genazzano, a Medici favorite, whose eloquent and learned sermons in the 1480s provided a challenge to Savonarola” upon his return to Florence in 1490.<sup>116</sup> Topics of religious reform were of particular interest to the congregations of Florence, and so it is no surprise that Savonarola’s later prophetic sermons were so wildly appealing.

Even from his earliest writings, Savonarola blended modest prophecy and moral redemption. Savonarola was a member of the Observant branch of the Dominican order, “which had been established at the end of the fourteenth century to introduce a return to simplicity and poverty.”<sup>117</sup> The order was led by reformist minded brothers who worked closely with patrons, such as the Medici in Florence. Savonarola’s early sermons, often referred to as his “Pastoral Sermons,” emphasize inner reflection, a return to simplicity, and the importance of Scripture. These are three of the core components of Savonarola’s philosophy. In a manner similar to that of Joachim of Fiore, Savonarola believed in the importance of letting go of worldly possessions to free the spirit. Releasing oneself from earthly possessions was a difficult task, one that often contradicted the prevailing theories of the time. Domenico Benivieni captured this sentiment perfectly in his 1496 *Tractato*, stating that “people never knew what the true Christian way of life was, believing that good living consisted in ceremonies and external works, which were praised by the clergy and friars because they brought them personal honor and profit.”<sup>118</sup> Savonarola introduced his congregation to the simplicity of the early Church, adding to his popularity. It was in his process of evaluating and incorporating both traditional and nontraditional sources that Savonarola began to formulate a transcendent, revolutionary ideology. This ideology, at its core, remained one of simplicity at every level. Savonarola

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<sup>114</sup> Borelli, Anne. *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. p. xvii.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. xvii.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. xvii.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. xvi.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. xx. Quoting Benivieni, 1496, fol. a3r-v.



continued to preach the importance of “inner spirituality free from external distraction” to all citizens, including women, whom he urged to avoid speaking with men, wandering the streets alone, or even gazing out of windows.<sup>119</sup>

### **Establishing a Revolutionary Ideology**

The Savonarolan movement began with the emergence of a prophet, Girolamo Savonarola himself. Savonarola first appeared in Florence in 1482, departing in 1487 when he was “appointed Master of Studies in the *Studium Generale* of San Domenico in Bologna.”<sup>120</sup> In 1490 he was reassigned to Florence at the request of Lorenzo de’Medici, and began preaching in San Marco. An examination of Savonarola’s early sermons yields his first prophecies during the Lenten season of 1486 when he was preaching in the city of San Gimignano. There was no specific connection to Florence, nor to the propitious prophecies that emerged in later years. These first prophecies centered upon the effects of “human sinfulness, the evil state of the Church, and the decay of Scriptural religion,” which he believed would eventually lead to “a great scourge, either of the Antichrist, war, sickness, or famine.”<sup>121</sup> Beginning in 1489, Savonarola turned to the Book of Revelation as the basis for the coming scourge of Italy in a number of sermons given throughout northern Italy.<sup>122</sup> It is important to note, in Savonarola’s *Compendium*, he omits these first instances of prophecy, giving the impression that it was not until his arrival in Florence that he first received prophetic inspiration. What is significant, however, is that “at a certain point Savonarola’s apocalyptic vision of future tribulations became millenarian and this worldly, his ascetic piety made room for a materialistic promise of riches and power.”<sup>123</sup>

Donald Weinstein, a noted historian and expert on Savonarola, goes to great lengths to provide an in-depth account of Savonarola’s progression as a prophet, beginning with his decision to enter the order of Friars Preachers in 1475. However, it was three years earlier that

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. xix.

<sup>120</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 74. This timeline was established first by Ridolfi, *Vita*, vol. I, p. 37 and n. 12.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>122</sup> The source of these reports was Piero Ginori Conti’s *La vita del Beato Ieronimo Savonarola*, which identifies Revelation 5:8-9, which states “And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.’”

<sup>123</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 77.

Savonarola first expressed his “dismay at the wickedness of the world and the corruption of Peter’s See.”<sup>124</sup> In a letter written to his father upon his departure for the Convent of San Domenico, Savonarola “catalogued the vices – ‘the wickedness of men, the carnal violence, the adulteries, the robberies, the pride, the idolatry, the cruel blasphemies’ – that had made him pray to *messer Iesu Christo* to remove him ‘from this filth’.”<sup>125</sup> His first few years were uneventful, and to a lesser degree unsuccessful.<sup>126</sup> In 1482 Savonarola accepted a mission to his birthplace, Ferrara. An outbreak of hostilities between Ferrara and Venice necessitated his placement in Florence. Initially, Florence fascinated Savonarola, but this quickly turned to disgust as he noticed that the “cultured citizens were dead to all sense of religion or morality; and the spirit of the fashionable heathen philosophy had even infected the brotherhood of San Marco.”<sup>127</sup> It was in 1484 that Savonarola first began to equate Biblical apocalyptic passages to modern events, leading to the sermons at San Gimignano discussed earlier in this section. Savonarola remarks that his inspiration for these prophecies, “was based not upon the light of revelation, nor even upon the Scriptures, as he had written in the *Compendium*, but upon reasons that were ‘written in diverse places,’ mentioning *lo tracte di Daniele san Hieronymo: Sancto Augustino Origene: et San Tomasso*.”<sup>128</sup> According to Weinstein’s research, these “diverse places” included the apocalyptic speculation so common during this period, especially the speculation associated with the year 1484. This speculation centered on the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, signifying the end of a Great Year and heralding wide-reaching changes in Christianity.<sup>129</sup>

Not much is known of Savonarola during his absence from Florence between 1487 and 1490. The Dominican Council at Reggio provided Savonarola the opportunity to display his

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 78. The support for this statement is found in Savonarola’s canzone, *De ruina mundi*, in which St. Peter is filled with vice and plunder. However, Peter is not punished immediately, leaving Savonarola to suppose that the delay “foretells a still worse scourge for her great sin; even perhaps that the time begins which makes Hell tremble – the Final Day.”

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>126</sup> According to the pseudo-Burlamacchi, *La vita*, p. 16, and the sixteenth-century account of the Ferrarese priest, Francesco Caloro, state “that Savonarola was inept when he first lived in Florence, years before he had begun to prophesy; so much so that his relatives, brothers, and intimate friends asked him to give up preaching; they were afraid he would dishonor his family, and the doctrine he preached.”

<sup>127</sup> Villari, Linda. “Savonarola, Girolamo.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. XXIV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911: 249.

<sup>128</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 87 citing Villari, *Savonarola*, vol. II, appendix, p. clxviii.

<sup>129</sup> The notion that the conjunction of certain planets marked significant events or changes in the destinies of certain religions was first introduced by the ninth century Arab astronomer, Albumasar. Albumasar’s theories had been introduced in the West since Roger Bacon’s time; however, by the late fifteenth century they were employed by court astrologers, influencing local leaders. Weinstein discusses this notion in depth on pages 88-90.

theological acumen fully. His knowledge and eloquence impressed Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the renowned philosopher, who promptly urged Lorenzo de Medici to summon Savonarola back to Florence.<sup>130</sup> Upon his return, Savonarola continued to refine his apocalyptic message. It was not until his sermons of 1494, however, that Florence appeared with any special significance. In fact, during one of his 1491 sermons he threatened Florentines “not only with the destruction of Italy but even with an especially severe punishment for the region.”<sup>131</sup> During this sermon, which he later deemed his “terrifying sermon,” Savonarola “predicted a time when men would risk their lives for Christ, would not amass riches or build great palaces or become clients of the powerful but would carry Christ in their hearts.”<sup>132</sup> In these early sermons, he was primarily concerned with social justice, but identified no significant role for himself in the reformation process. Many of the reasons Savonarola gave for the coming scourge were in relation to “the excesses of the rich, their oppression of the poor, and the injustice of the greedy, which destroyed the happiness of the community.”<sup>133</sup> There was no intimation that such corruption would lead to the overturn of the government. It was not until 1492 and Savonarola’s election to the priorate of San Marco that his vision of reform began to take shape. Savonarola set about “re-establish[ing] the discipline of the order and sweep[ing] away abuses.”<sup>134</sup> For this reason he successfully obtained “a papal brief emancipating the Dominicans of San Marco from the rule of the Lombard vicars of that order.”<sup>135</sup> From this point on, Savonarola’s future was directly connected to that of San Marco and of Florence.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is most well known for his defense of the 900 theses on religion, philosophy, natural philosophy and magic in 1486, from which he wrote the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. He first settled in Florence around 1484 where he met and greatly charmed Lorenzo de Medici, who continued to support and protect Giovanni until his death in 1492.

<sup>131</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 98.

<sup>132</sup> Borelli, Anne. *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. p. xxi.

<sup>133</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 98.

<sup>134</sup> Villari, Linda. “Savonarola, Girolamo.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. XXIV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911: 250.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p: 250.

<sup>136</sup> Savonarola initially proposed moving the brothers of San Marco into the chestnut forest of Montecavo, where they could live a life of repentance apart from the world. However, the older brothers were afraid to leave the comforts of Florence and began a campaign against him, informing the families of the brothers that it would be a dangerous undertaking, eventually forcing Savonarola to give up his plan. As Savonarola and the brothers were forced to remain in Florence, Savonarola became increasingly interested in the political and social undertakings of the city.

## Florentine History



Figure 5. Italy 1494.<sup>137</sup>

The traditional vision of Florence is derived from the accounts of Niccolo Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini. According to Machiavelli's *History of Florence*, following the death of Lorenzo de Medici, the city was at the height of its prosperity. Lorenzo focused his efforts on beautifying the city, and educating the city's youth. Guicciardini notes that "under Lorenzo the city was not free, although it would have been impossible to have had a better or more pleasing tyrant."<sup>138</sup> In order to secure his power in the city, Lorenzo often replaced older members of the ruling circle with younger, unknown men. Piero, Lorenzo's eldest son, took possession of the city following his father's death on 8 April 1492. Piero, however, was not as gifted as his father in the realm of governing and the quality of life began to quickly deteriorate. Like his father, Piero also relied on men of obscurity versus the wise men Lorenzo deposed. By relying on men subservient to him, Piero lacked the resident knowledge to identify issues needing attention. One

<sup>137</sup> Shepherd, William R. *Historical Atlas*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923. Map supplied Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>138</sup> Francesco Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi O pere, vol. VIII (Bari, 1931), p. 30, 52-54, 80.

such issue revolved around Church offices. The Medici family had a great deal of influence on those who attained ecclesiastical offices, which were considered quite prestigious for the patrician families. Lorenzo's second son, the Cardinal Giovanni "took possession of every benefice that fell vacant, thus usurping the ecclesiastical as well as the civil power" in order to expand his ecclesiastical patrimony.<sup>139</sup> Piero assisted his brother in this practice, ultimately restricting his freedom with the Pope to the detriment of his throne.

Florentine's citizens opposed Piero as soon as he first attained power; however, it was his foreign policy that finally ignited the population against him. Whereas Lorenzo attempted to balance favor among the Italian powers, Piero plunged into a one sided alliance with Naples, often attributed to family loyalties due to his marriage to an Orsini. Piero continually backed the Neapolitans against the French, which was universally upsetting to the leading Florentine citizens, who for too long had suffered under Neapolitan cruelty.<sup>140</sup> However, there is no evidence that the general population was ready to revolt against Piero. In June 1493, a disagreement that first began in a Franciscan cloister turned into a full-scale riot involving the prominent families who rode through the city streets attempting to raise up enough of the populace to oust Piero. They were ultimately unsuccessful, realizing "that it would take something more catastrophic than a monkish quarrel to overthrow Piero."<sup>141</sup> Piero Parenti, one of the foremost historians, wrote that although "there was a universal desire in the city to throw off the Medici yoke, there was no leader to be found whom the people might follow."<sup>142</sup>

One of the key aspects of Florentine history so significant to the emergence of a millenarian belief structure was the "long-standing civic tradition" that had been present there for quite some time.<sup>143</sup> To the citizens of Florence, their city's destiny had always been shaped by a divine hand, and as such, unusual occurrences were often interpreted by local astrologers and prophets to identify their hidden meaning. As was often the case during this period, Florentine failures were viewed as punishments for the sins of the citizenry and successes were viewed as rewards for their benevolence. By the end of the fourteenth century a new public ethos was expounded by local humanists, one that "emphasized the active virtues of the citizen in guiding

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<sup>139</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, aed. Schnitzer, p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> In the war of 1452, Cosimo de Medici sided with Charles VII of France and made bitter enemies of Venice and Naples during the struggle.

<sup>141</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 125.

<sup>142</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, fol. 164 recto.

<sup>143</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 34.

the destinies of a state whose purpose was the enhancement of freedom and the development of the individual.”<sup>144</sup> This view developed in line with the popular and patriotic traditions, which formed the foundation for many aspects of Florentine society, including local artists and writers who relied on these traditions to give credence to the concept of Florentine artistic greatness.

According to Weinstein there are two central themes present in traditional strains of Florentine civic destiny – “the idea of Florence as the daughter of Rome and the idea of Florence as the center of rebirth and Christian renewal.”<sup>145</sup> In a sense, the theme of Florence as the daughter of Rome had a significant impact on secular history, but it was the theme of rebirth that had a significant impact on sacred history. This myth remained in the city’s collective subconscious, providing a source of comfort in times of tribulation and support in all enterprises. In this context, when examining Savonarola’s claims that Florence would be “more glorious, richer, more powerful than ever appears neither unique, nor foreign, nor as a regression to ‘medieval’ ways of thinking, but as another stage in the protean relationship of the two themes of which it was composed.”<sup>146</sup> An examination of these two themes may provide some insight into Savonarola’s message and its’ impact on the city.

The first theme, Florence as the daughter of Rome, was introduced in the thirteenth century *Chronica de origine civitatis*, tracing the city’s origin to Roman colonization in the time of Julius Ceasar. According to this work, “Florence was founded from the flower of Roman manhood, and she was a little Rome.”<sup>147</sup> The *Chronica* also introduced the theme of rebirth as well. Five hundred years after Florence was founded, Totila destroyed her, and when the Romans rebuilt the city they named each of the city’s churches after a church in Rome. By the fourteenth century this myth had slightly changed, identifying the French Emperor Charlemagne as the city’s restorer. Through the arts the model of civic ethos continued to be that of the republican Rome; however, in 1378, another model emerged as well, that of the New Jerusalem. A number of prophecies emerged, citing Florence as the ascending leader following the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. This notion was developed by Leonardo Bruni during the early fifteenth century, following the successful rise against the Visconti threat.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p. 35. Obviously neither of these notions is entirely restricted to Florentine thought, which will be discussed in more depth in the coming sections as this should be considered a potential precondition, in some respects, for millenarian action. For a more general discussion on this topic please refer to William Hammer, “The New or Second Rome in the Middle Ages,” *Speculum*, XIX (1944), 50-62; Nicolai Rubinstein, “Some Ideas on Municipal Progress and Decline in the Italy of the Communes,” J. K. Hyde, “Medieval Descriptions of Cities,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Manchester*, 48 (1966), 308-40.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

displacement of the Roman Church. It is not until the mid-fifteenth century that the myth of Florence became “a conscious tool of official civic rhetoric.”<sup>148</sup> In each of the prophecies, Florence is “associated with a coming age of spiritual perfection and peace,” although each has a different version of what the coming age entails.<sup>149</sup> It is through the progression of prophecies, poetry, and various other texts that the myth of Florence propagates, influencing the collective subconscious and providing the populace with an underlying philosophy capable of explaining the course of history.

### **Savonarola Rising**

Savonarola’s success was inextricably linked to the impending French invasion. Charles VIII began entertaining notions of Italian conquest, believing through French rule the world would come under the one true king. Endowed with legal claims to the Kingdom of Naples and inundated with predictions of his success, Charles believed he would emerge victorious. Rumors of French domination spread quickly through merchants to Italy. So when Charles VIII finally began his expedition it caused a kind of “mysterious anxiety” throughout the region.<sup>150</sup> Charles entered Italy on 5 September, slowly making his way towards Naples. On 31 October Piero de’Medici led the Florentine embassy to cut the King off prior to entering Florence. Rather than protecting Florence, Piero quickly agreed to hand over 200,000 ducats and the strategic fortresses of Sarzand, Pisa, and Livorno. The appearance of Charles and his army “stripped the Florentine state of key ports and border towns, leaving her in a weakened and precarious position.”<sup>151</sup>

Savonarola seized this opportunity to remind the Florentines that he had been warning them of such an attack since 1492. By 5 November 1494 the Council sent Savonarola to Charles’ camp with the “free and absolute authority to do and say whatever [he] decided for the safety of” Florence.<sup>152</sup> Savonarola was told to ensure Charles understood that Piero himself established the anti-French policy instituted in Florence earlier in hopes of renouncing Piero as Florence’s spokesman. By 9 November, the Florentines expelled Piero de’Medici and his

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>150</sup> Delaborde, L’expédition, p. 317.

<sup>151</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 114.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 115 quoting the “Instructions données aux ambassadeurs envoyés à la rencontre de Charles VIII,” in G. Canestrini and A. Dejardins, *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1859-86) vol. 1, p. 600. The other members of the embassy were Piero Capponi, Tanai de’ Nerli, Pandolfo Rucellai, and Giovanni Cavalcanti.

brothers for turning over “the citadels of Livorno and Pisa, Florence’s lifelines to the sea.”<sup>153</sup> On 17 November, Charles entered the city to begin negotiations. He made it quite clear that Florence would be treated as a defeated enemy. He demanded Piero’s reinstatement, believing that a dependent Florence would be easier to manage. Savonarola was tasked with persuading the King “to accept terms more favorable to the new republic.”<sup>154</sup> A treaty more in line with Florentine ideals was signed by the 25<sup>th</sup>. The terms of such an agreement were that “the French would restore Pisa to Florentine hegemony and return the fortresses as soon as practicable, while Florence agreed to pay the French a subsidy of 120,000 ducats.”<sup>155</sup> To the Florentines this seemed like a miracle, and Savonarola became a true prophet in the eyes of the local citizenry. The Florentines now had to learn to act as a republic without Medici rule.

Savonarola primarily concerned himself with the local conditions of morality. However, the disruptions caused by Charles’ invasion put a strain on “Florentine civic life,” upsetting trade and industry and “jeopardizing the livelihood of the poor and the profits of the rich.”<sup>156</sup> By entering into a treaty with France, Florence had become isolated amongst the other Italian states, weakening Italian liberty.<sup>157</sup> As a result, the Florentines were at a significant disadvantage in trading with the surrounding region, leaving many of the local citizens in a tough financial situation. Savonarola urged the citizens to “govern their new state through prayer and good actions; give up usury, helping those in need out of love rather than greed; drive out *gl’incantatori e le superstizioni e divinatory* and restore the divine cult.”<sup>158</sup> As Savonarola was beginning to understand, not only had Florence been saved from destruction for a Divine purpose, but it had also been saved because it was to “become the center of a new, more glorious age.”<sup>159</sup> Savonarola was to be their prophet, come to show the Florentines how to build their new Temple that would “soon become that celestial Jerusalem.”<sup>160</sup> However, it was up to the citizens of Florence to justify their selection as the chosen city. This was a radical change in

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>154</sup> Ridolfi, Vita, vol. I, p. 131-134.

<sup>155</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 137. It was common knowledge that Charles greatly respected Savonarola, who had predicted Charles’ coming as divinely ordained as discussed in Villari, Linda. “Savonarola, Girolamo.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. XXIV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911: 250.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>157</sup> Guicciardini, Storie fiorentine, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi.

<sup>158</sup> Prediche sopra Aggeo, ed. Luigi Firpo (Rome, 1965), p. 129-141.

<sup>159</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 142.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 142.



Savonarola's ideology. His earlier convictions that the modern world should be rejected for a simpler way of life more in line with that of the Bible had given way to the notion that "the world could be – indeed, would be – transformed, with the regeneration not only of the individual penitent but of society itself."<sup>161</sup>

For the most part, Savonarola's followers did not question God's selection of Florence as the New Jerusalem. For Florentines it was obvious that they were the most intelligent and, as the center of Italy, the most suitable and secure location for the coming of Charles VIII. They invoked the historic Florentine tradition of civic liberty, which had been the norm prior to Medicean rule. In accordance with this mode of thinking, Savonarola had reestablished Florentine liberty and deposed a tyrant. Precisely because Savonarola and his supporters had aligned themselves with the "traditional values and goals of civic patriotism, [they] were able to put their enemies in the position of seeming to argue against those cherished values and goals as well as against the divine will which, according to the Florentine myth, had always sustained the glorious destiny of their city."<sup>162</sup> Naysayers did exist, but in the meantime Savonarola's vision provided a solid foundation and hope for the previously unstable future.

Savonarola's message continued to evolve as his power grew. His initial preconception that Florence's fulfillment as the New Jerusalem would occur only after it was earned through the deeds of the Florentine citizens was replaced by the notion that Florence would become the New Jerusalem no matter how deserving the Florentine citizens. Savonarola came to equate "spiritual conversion to civic peace-making, to concern for the *bene commune*, even to constitutional reform."<sup>163</sup> Repentance came to signify the actions necessary to build the new City of God. This movement was ultimately Savonarola's vision alone, and he alone had the ability to interpret the Scripture in light of God's divine authority. In this way "the Bible was not [meant] to be put into the hands of the Everyman; it had to be expounded by those who were skilled in a complex exegetical method."<sup>164</sup> God's divine authority was limited to a select few, ensuring that the majority would not rebel against these prophets.

Savonarola did not turn his attention to civic matters initially. In actuality it took approximately one month before Savonarola began preaching the methods behind instituting the

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p. 246.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 179.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

spiritual reformation he had imagined. As Charles VIII departed the city, the community began looking inward to determine which changes should be instituted first. On 30 November, the principal citizens of the city held a meeting. In this meeting three recommendations were set forth, including “the preparation of a new electoral list of citizens eligible for public office, the selection of twenty commissioners who would elect the Signoria by hand, and the calling of a general assembly of the people to approve the new program.”<sup>165</sup> On 2 December the general assembly took place, eliminating the councils that reigned under Medici rule, eradicating the taxes levied on the sale of commodities, and establishing a Council of Ten to manage the recovery of Pisa.<sup>166</sup> The wealthy patricians that attempted the coup d’état on 9 November believed that they would become the new government. However, Florentine citizens did not agree with this sentiment. The citizens became disconcerted by the general assembly because “they had taken up arms to regain their liberty only to preserve in power the same men who had ruled before, with the exception of a few.”<sup>167</sup> The general assembly might have survived if the prestigious few had been able to maintain some level of cooperation. However, the collective arrogance of the patricians divided them, weakening their position in the city. Two of the most important leaders in particular, Piero Capponi and Francesco Valori, each had their own following, their own ambitions and their own desire to obtain offices for friends and relatives, separating followers even further.

The wealthy patricians who had originally led the revolt against Medicean rule realized the need to influence the population. Savonarola’s sermons throughout this period directly reflect the patricians’ desire to create a republic that they could rule. The patricians greatly respected Savonarola at this time because he had “such authority among the people that whatever he said had to be approved.”<sup>168</sup> In order to gain his support, the wealthy patricians were more than willing to enter an agreement with Savonarola regarding political amnesty, which Savonarola referred to as *la pace universale*. For Savonarola this political amnesty “was a concrete expression of his moral ideal of universal reconciliation, but the practical implication of a political amnesty was the protection it would provide the former Medici collaborators from

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<sup>165</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 148.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 149. Piero Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Joseph Schnitzer (Leipzig, 1910), p. 21.

<sup>168</sup> Piero Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Joseph Schnitzer p. 26.

possible reprisals.”<sup>169</sup> Up until this point many of the former Medicean supporters were removed from office or, under more extreme circumstances, put to death. Fearing the spread of such reprisals for all Medici supporters, the wealthy patricians wished to institute a general amnesty to protect themselves from the public, and this provided the perfect opportunity.<sup>170</sup> It was not until 19 March 1495 that such a measure was successfully passed, strengthening the position of the wealthy patricians currently in power. The patricians’ desire for power also drove their suggestion to model the new republic after Venice, which “was an aristocratic republic, its Consiglio Grande an exclusive, virtually hereditary corporation.”<sup>171</sup> In order to institute such a reform it was necessary to convince the public that this particular model would provide the liberties the citizens so desperately desired after expelling Piero. It may be difficult to understand Savonarola’s motivation in aligning with the wealthy patricians, especially given his prior exclamations against the excesses of the rich. However, Savonarola’s belief system almost required such an alliance, as he firmly believed that the greatest danger to society was domestic dissonance that would undoubtedly lead to tyrannical rule, as had happened under the Medicean government.

Many of the elite attempted to control the spread and influence of Savonarola. Pope Alexander VI, who had long regretted the “enfranchisement of San Marco’s from the rule of the Lombard Dominicans,” took it upon himself to eliminate Savonarola. The Pope first offered Savonarola a cardinalship, which Savonarola promptly declined. In July 1495, the Pope summoned Savonarola to Rome for the first time. After the third unsuccessful attempt the Pope turned to threats. The Pope, however, was not Savonarola’s only enemy. One of the many charges brought against him was the belief that Savonarola’s visions were brought to him, not by God, but by the Devil. A second quite common accusation was that Savonarola was plotting to form a new religious sect. The skeptics also played upon “Florentine chauvinism by complaining that it was shameful to be ruled by a foreigner.”<sup>172</sup> The basis of such remarks seems to have been linked to a common fear that introducing foreign rule, especially by an individual

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<sup>169</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 250.

<sup>170</sup> Up until this time reprisals had been limited to individuals associated with the worst aspects of tyranny including Antonio di Bernardo Miniati, provveditore of the Monte who was hanged; Ser Giovanni di Bartolomeo Guidi, a former official of the chancery, who was imprisoned; Bartolomeo Scala, First Chancellor under both Piero and Lorenzo, who was dismissed from his post. Each of these individuals worked for the Medici regime and were sacrificed to the Florentines to quell their thirst for vengeance.

<sup>171</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 251.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 238.

without definitive ties to the city would be detrimental to their wellbeing. These arguments did gain ground towards the end of Savonarola's reign; however, during the early years of the Florentine republic they did not hold the same appeal as Savonarola's romantic vision for the future.

Even though Savonarola supported the claims of the local patricians, he also bore witness to the needs of the 'everyman'. Once he had established himself as the mouthpiece for constitutional reform, Savonarola began to incorporate his own beliefs and ideals into his sermons, much to the chagrin of the local elite. Savonarola quickly came to believe that the new government must establish itself in more democratic terms than its Venetian counterpart. He thought this could be achieved "by broadening the distribution of offices through a combination of election for the major offices and sortition for the minor ones."<sup>173</sup> Savonarola suggested the citizenry become involved in the reformation plans prior to their submission to the Signoria. Afraid that this would interfere with their authority, the wealthy patricians modified the suggestion to some degree. Ultimately the wealthy patricians determined it was in their best interest to submit all reformation proposals to the Signoria, allowing them to shape the new constitution. It became obvious that two primary modifications should occur, "the establishment of a Great Council with broad powers and the reform[ed] system of choosing public officials."<sup>174</sup> Savonarola was successful. Even though the new system was adapted from the Venetian model Florence did not base its eligibility for council seats on hereditary ties. One other clause is worth mentioning that falls in line with Savonarola's suggestion to obtain *la pace universale* - the restriction of the Signoria's political power. According to this clause the Signoria was unable to act without a two-thirds majority of the Council in all political decisions. According to this new method "membership in the new council should devolve upon those citizens whose names had been drawn for one of the three major magistracies, or whose fathers' or grandfathers' names had been drawn."<sup>175</sup> In the end, however, election to the Council "tended to favor men of experience, reputation, and influence, so that a considerable degree of continuity is observable in the formation of policy and the wielding of power."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 254.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 255.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 256.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 264.

Regardless, the Council did influence the political climate to some degree, increasing the number of individuals participating in the legislative process. Minor offices had an extremely high turnover rate, leading to a more comprehensive distribution of citizen involvement. The number of eligible citizens rose to approximately 3000, which “to some extent justified the growing tendency to refer to the new regime as a *governo popolare*.”<sup>177</sup> In this way Savonarola was truly successful, including more individuals in the democratic process even if it was not in the Council itself. If anything, this inclination toward democracy made policies and regulations even more difficult to approve. The Council, who were required to approve every piece of legislation, often disagreed with the Signoria on the approach necessary. According to historians, this period of dissent and confusion began to take its toll on the citizens. The Council eagerly agreed that they must recapture Pisa; however, this undertaking had grave consequences for the city itself, as well as for Savonarola. The war “dragged on, draining the city’s resources, shaking the Florentines’ confidence in their prophet and undermining their trust in” one another.<sup>178</sup> Florence’s alliance with France was another bone of contention, placing stress on the local trade and industry as a result of the ill will felt by the surrounding region, which did not support an alliance with France. This disruption in trade ultimately led to a drop in workers’ wages. As an example of the extreme economic depression overtaking the city, the “wages of skilled stonemasons, which between 1490 and 1494 had ranged from thirteen to fourteen *soldi* per day in winter and fifteen to sixteen *soldi* per day in summer, fell to the ranges of ten to eleven and eleven to twelve *soldi* respectively and remained at this lower level until the end of the century.”<sup>179</sup> This was a significant decrease of almost twenty five percent. The local citizenry grew tense due to the numerous difficulties of the period. Economic struggles, foreign policy, and class suspicion bred a situation difficult for either Savonarola or the Council to restrain.

Upon establishment of a new civic order, Savonarola began interpreting Scripture in order to “inspire the Florentines to undertake reform and to persist in the work of renewal.”<sup>180</sup> The reform that Savonarola sought, however, was only possible with spiritual regeneration. He had finally realized that interpretation of Scripture alone could not usher in a new phase of

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<sup>177</sup> Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, chapter 1.

<sup>178</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 266.

<sup>179</sup> Professor Richard Goldthwaite. Study of the construction of the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, p. 159.

reformation. Divine inspiration was needed in conjunction with Scriptural interpretation to lead the citizens to fulfillment of their divine purpose. Savonarola used millennial eschatology to legitimate his prophetic message. He came to rely on “such human institutions as the French monarchy and the Florentine state to initiate the new order,” in line with the more traditional postmillenarian movements.<sup>181</sup> It was not until the newfound truce between France and Florence that Savonarola truly saw a role for King Charles in the establishment of this New Jerusalem. Charles VIII became the embodiment of the foretold renovator of the Church, charged with conquering and converting those in his way.

During this period Savonarola continued to prophesy and preach. In order to eliminate vice, the Signoria was forced to “take measures to purge [the city of] gaming lasciviousness, sodomy, usury, and other defects, and to see that virtuous works be undertaken.”<sup>182</sup> Moreover, laws were passed against “poetry and gaming and drinking and indecent dress of women and all those things which are pernicious of the soul’s health. Taxes [were] reformed so that they [fell] upon property and not be set on the size of dowries so that they [would] not impoverish families: five hundred ducats for the greater families and three hundred for the families of artisans. Above everything else, it was necessary that no one be allowed to become the sole head of the city, because a people under a tyrant is like water which has been held under pressure when it finds a hole through which to escape it rushes out impetuously and ruinously.”<sup>183</sup> He continuously shaped Florentine public life – “public games like the palio, were suspended; old time festivals were transformed into pious processions; hymns celebrating Florence as the New Jerusalem replaced profane canti carnascialeschi; laws were passed to suppress immodest dress and conduct; and the youth of the city were mobilized to roam the streets on the lookout for violators.”<sup>184</sup> Savonarola’s desire for reform reached beyond the status of Florentine civic life. He preached of extensive church reform, including a rebellion against the Pope. As news spread of Savonarola’s insurrection, the Pope realized he must rid Florence of his opponent. The Pope ordered Savonarola to relinquish power by requiring San Marco, Savonarola’s parish, to join a new Tuscan-Roman congregation that the Pope had stricter control over. As could be expected, Savonarola declined. By 18 June 1497 the Pope charged Savonarola with “spreading pernicious

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 165. “Postmillenarianism implies that the Christian agencies of the world are able to bring about the millennial order, achieving it within historical time and before the return of Christ.”

<sup>182</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Schnitzer, p. 26-27.

<sup>183</sup> *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, p. 210-211.

<sup>184</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 271.

doctrine, with defiance of the papal prohibition against his preaching, and with disobeying the order to join San Marco to the Tuscan-Roman congregation.”<sup>185</sup> Savonarola was excommunicated, along with all who interacted with him in any public way, be it through attending his sermons, or speaking to him in public. His followers, however, did not turn against him quickly. Their distrust spread like a disease, slowly infecting the city with doubt.

The summer of 1497 was afflicted by “food shortages, unemployment, the plague, and an abortive raid by Piero de’Medici which was checked just outside the city walls.”<sup>186</sup> By August a plot was discovered to restore Piero to the throne. Five of the city’s wealthy patricians were accused, and as was their right, requested a final trial before the Council. There was great debate over the subject until Francesco Valori, the Gonfalonier of Justice and head of the Signoria, stepped forward demanding justice. The men were quickly executed without their final hearing. Tension continued to spread throughout the community. It was believed that Savonarola could have easily spared their lives had he asked for mercy, but he did not. Savonarola’s silence “proved fatal to his popularity with moderate men, and whetted the fury of the pope.”<sup>187</sup> The ban on Savonarola’s preaching grated on him, until finally during Lent of 1498 he could take it no longer and gave his first sermon in over a year. Out of fear of papal authority, many Florentines did not flock to hear him speak. Regardless, papal retribution was quick and “in March the Pope decided to seize Florentine goods in the papal territories until Savonarola had been surrendered up to him; and that failing, to confiscate the goods and imprison the merchants themselves.”<sup>188</sup> The Florentine citizens continued to believe in their prophet and none could agree on whether it would be best for the city’s wellbeing to side with the Pope or with Savonarola. The citizens determined the most appropriate approach would be a compromise between the two. They would require Savonarola to cease preaching, but they would not give him to the Romans.

Even though Savonarola did step down officially from the pulpit, he continued to say mass, much to his enemies’ dismay. Fear of papal retribution unified anti-Savonarolans against the preacher. Savonarola did not fear the Pope’s reprisal, sending letters “to rulers of Europe and

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p. 281.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p. 281.

<sup>187</sup> Villari, Linda. “Savonarola, Girolamo.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. XXIV.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911: 252.

<sup>188</sup> Ridolfi, Vita, vol. I, p. 349

adjuring them to assemble a council to condemn the antipope.”<sup>189</sup> One of these letters was intercepted by the duke of Milan and sent to the pope. On 25 March 1498 on the Feast of the Annunciation, Francesco di Puglia, a Franciscan preacher challenged Savonarola to prove himself and his doctrine through fire. According to this method two preachers on either side would walk into the fire together. If any man perished the side he was on would be condemned and the leaders banished. If everyone perished only Savonarola would be condemned, and if any of the men refused to enter the fire that side would suffer banishment. As the crowds gathered to bear witness to this trial a storm appeared and the rain put out the fire. This was taken as a sign; however, the citizens were not satisfied. A crowd gathered the following Sunday in front of San Marco, ultimately seizing Savonarola, Domenico da Pescia, and Sylvestro Maruffi. The prisoners were brought to the Palazzo Vecchio and held in the tower cell. The pope rejoiced at Savonarola’s capture and requested the prisoners be sent straight to Rome. The Council refused, electing judges from amongst Savonarola’s enemies. The Council voted unanimously to torture each of the hostages, in hopes of obtaining a signed confession by Savonarola stating “that he had not spoken to God nor God to him ‘in any special way’ and that his prophetic certainty had been a sham.”<sup>190</sup> In an attempt to gain control over the situation the pope “allowed” the prisoners to remain in Florence if he could appoint the final commissioners. These commissioners were given explicit instructions to kill Savonarola “even were he a second John the Baptist.”<sup>191</sup> The commissioners tortured Savonarola for three consecutive days, until on 22 May the commissioners found each of the preachers to be “heretics and [schismatics] and to have preached ‘new doctrines’.”<sup>192</sup> On 23 May, all three preachers were hung on crosses and burned alive. Their remains were “collected in a cart and thrown into the Arno.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Villari, Linda. “Savonarola, Girolamo.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. XXIV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911: 252.

<sup>190</sup> Villari, Linda. *Savonarola, vol. II*, appendix, pp. cl-clj.

<sup>191</sup> Villari, Linda. “Savonarola, Girolamo.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. XXIV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911: 252.

<sup>192</sup> Villari, Linda. *Savonarola, vol. II*, appendix, p. cxviiij.

<sup>193</sup> Villari, Linda. “Savonarola, Girolamo.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. XXIV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911: 253.





**Figure 6. Savonarola's Execution.**<sup>194</sup>

Even after his demise, Savonarola continued to have a lasting influence on the Piagnoni. This lasting influence had a great deal to do with the increased role politics played. Many of the leaders opposed to Savonarola assumed “that his downfall would carry the government of the Great Council with it.”<sup>195</sup> With this in mind, they attempted to quickly and quietly punish the leaders aligned to Savonarola. However, the opposition underestimated the power of the popular republicanism. Many of Savonarola's most violent opponents were fiercely supportive of the Great Council. Obviously not everyone who supported the Great Council also believed in Florence's role as the New Jerusalem; however, as perceived during Savonarola's reign, millenarian ideals supported the republican liberty.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Savonarola's influence on Florence is quite interesting for several reasons. Specifically, Savonarola was able to affix explicit details and traditions present in Florence to one another,

<sup>194</sup> Anonymous painting of the Hanging and Burning of Girolamo Savonarola in Piazza della Signoria in Florence 1498. This image is in the United States public domain because its copyright has expired according to the Copyright Terms in the United States.

<sup>195</sup> Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970. p. 320.

creating an entirely new belief structure. None of the ideas present in Savonarola's sermons were completely original. In fact, millennial ideas were rampant in Italy and Europe at that time. Savonarola expertly tied these millennial traditions to the Florentine myth of superiority and distinction together to encourage a new republican ideology. Florence as the New Jerusalem became the motivating force to overthrow the government. Earlier attempts had failed precisely because there was no reason to believe in something larger; something important enough to fight and die for. In essence "Savonarola was serving the spiritual needs of a people who longed to be told that worldly wealth and power were not in themselves immoral or unchristian, and that pursuit of secular goals might even be reconciled with the striving for renewal and redemption."<sup>196</sup>

It is important to understand that even though these apocalyptic notions were present in other countries and kingdoms, these other countries and kingdoms did not respond to outside threats and economic strife with the creation of a militant millennial movement. Florence, however, had an extensive development of the bourgeois, which reflected regularly on the meaning of their city and its destiny. In a way these first intimations of sectionalism had significant consequences on the Florentines ability to unite against a common threat. The traditional struggles that often precede the emergence of a millennial movement were all present in Florence: a charismatic figure, militant elitism, perceived injustice, reversal of status, as well as antinomianism. However, it was the Florentine sense of sectionalism, which did often express itself through a version of militant elitism that truly drove the establishment of a messianic movement. This sectionalism was the tie that bound the messianic movement to the political and social institutions. It was the movement's tie to the political institutions however, that made it so intransigent and durable.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 376.

## Babi Movement

The Babi movement is unique in the explicit connection that exists between doctrine and sociopolitical processes of the time. It emerged at the critical juncture as Persian society undertook substantial reform and Shi'ism itself was evolving. Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad Shírází, known as the Bab or the Gate to the Hidden Imam, established a movement that would ultimately challenge the authority of contemporary Shi'i leaders. It is one of the few movements that "consciously and concretely broke away from Islamic beliefs and Islamic community and initiated a new prophetic cycle with its own scripture, sense of community, and vision."<sup>197</sup> Although short-lived, this movement ultimately led to the establishment of a pacifist branch that valued religious tolerance and political quietism, known as Baha'ism.

## Origins and Doctrine

As a movement, Babism is best described across four interdependent themes: "legalism, esotericism, polarity, and millenarianism."<sup>198</sup> These themes represent the continued progression of the movement even through its dissociation with the Shaykhi traditions it so often relied on throughout its early development.<sup>199</sup> The manifestation of these themes within the movement changed dramatically following the Bab's open declaration of higher claims. In its initial form, Babism bore a striking resemblance to orthodox Islam; however, the movement formally deviated from the standards of fundamental Islam in 1848, becoming an open threat to the religious and state authorities. Of the Bab's writings, it is the Qayyūm al-Asmā, which formally documents his mission, and the Bayan, which records Babi laws, that are the most important. In the movement's later years as the Bab's communication became increasingly restricted, the teachings and writings of his leading disciples also assumed a level of significance previously unheard of.

Legalism, an important aspect of Islam in general, took on specific importance in the Bab's teachings. In its original manifestation, Babism "was characterized by its insistence on the observance of Shi'i Islamic law and custom."<sup>200</sup> Moreover, the Bab initiated a number of ordinances that served to intensify regulations identified in the Qur'an and the sunna, making

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<sup>197</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009. p. 111.

<sup>198</sup> Smith, Peter. *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. p. 31.

<sup>199</sup> Shaykhism is an Islamic religious movement founded by Shaykh Ahmad in the early nineteenth century Qajar Iran. It began from a combination of Sufi and Shi'a doctrines of the end times and the day of resurrection. The link that exists between Babism and Shaykhism will be explored in the subsequent analysis.

<sup>200</sup> MacEoin, Denis. *Rituals in Babism and Baha'ism*. London: British Academic Press, 1994. p. 6.

these practices previously recommended to followers as obligatory, and those discouraged as altogether forbidden.<sup>201</sup> In the early formation Babis were considered extremely devout in their observance of Islamic law. Following his declaration as the Qá'im, these priorities began to change.<sup>202</sup> Increasingly his followers distanced themselves from the Islamic customs and laws. In place of the traditional customs and laws the Bab “set out detailed prescriptions for legal and ritual practice, principally in the Persian and Arabic Bayans.”<sup>203</sup> The most significant aspect of these works is the lack of traceability to the Prophet and his Companions. Through the Bayan, the Bab supplied his followers with directives for all occasions that would supersede the traditional Islamic customs. Adherence to these laws was loosely followed due to the localized nature of the movement and the limited availability of the Bayan.

Esotericism was intimately linked to the notion of legalism, although to what extent continues to be a source of debate. In its moderate form, it is accommodated as the inner truth for the external faith. In its extreme form, it has led to breaks with the formal laws that govern the faith. Shaykhism represents one of the most formal representations of Shi'i esotericism, developed following the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í (1753-1826).<sup>204</sup> The Babi movement utilized much of the foundational doctrine available and recruited converts from the Shaykhi school. There are three distinct aspects of Ahsá'í's teachings that specifically influenced the chiliastic nature of the Shaykhi school, “the redefinition of the resurrection of man, the location of the Imam in the intermediary world of Hurqalya, and the encounter between the Imam and the Perfect Shi'a in the state of meditation.”<sup>205</sup> Ahsá'í claimed to have derived his knowledge from the guidance of the Imams through a series of visions. For his followers, Ahsá'í was the singular manifestation of the Perfect Shi'a, the true intermediary between them and the

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<sup>201</sup> In his early letters, he “put desirable matters (mustahabbat) in the place of obligatory (wajibat) and undesirable matters (makruhat) in the place of forbidden (muharramat). Ibid, p. 6. An example of one such ordinance was the pilgrimage of ‘Ashura became an obligation.

<sup>202</sup> Qá'im translates as “He Who Arises” and is a messiah-like figure in Shi'ism, similar to and often interchangeable with the Mahdi, but distinctly within the Shi'a tradition.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>204</sup> For more information on early Shaykhis see Vahid Rafati, ‘The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shi'i Islam’ (Ph.D. dissertation. University of California at Los Angeles, 1979).

<sup>205</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 54. These particular teachings are significant in a number of ways. By introducing an intermediary stage for the soul, Ahsá'í ultimately redesigned the concept of resurrection and removed “the problem of corporal resurrection from the earthly grave” (52). The body perishes, but the soul remains in the world of Hurqalya to be resurrected in a new identical corpse. This intermediary world also allows for a location to encounter the Hidden Imam. Ahsá'í proposes that one individual can visualize the all-embracing state of consciousness of the Hidden Imam, which he refers to as the Perfect Shi'a. Hurqalya literally translates to the world of archetypal images.

Hidden Imam.<sup>206</sup> The notion of the Perfect Shi'a was so vital to the Shaykhi school of thought that it became the Fourth Pillar of Shaykhi doctrine following "unity of God, prophethood, and recognition of the Imam."<sup>207</sup> The gravity of this fourth pillar can be felt through the correspondence of Ahsá'í's protégé, Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, which references the time when the Hidden Imam would appear to resolve the persecutions of Shaykhis. As Abbas Amanat notes, it is through this correspondence that many Shaykhis found the calling to identify a definite date for the Imam's arrival.<sup>208</sup> The doctrinal foundation laid by both Ahsá'í and Rashtí established a messianic framework within the Shaykhi school, creating a climate where a charismatic figure, such as Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad Shírází, could gain a stronghold.

Polarity, as Peter Smith refers to it, represents the importance of a charismatic authority within the movement. This theme is specifically realized as a continuation of esotericism. As Shaykhism searched for a method of attaining and realizing inner truth, the notion of the Perfect Shi'a came to represent the core of esoteric belief. The Babi movement continued to refine this notion, making the charismatic authority a central tenet. Through his claims, the Bab assumed a position devoid of secularity. The significance of this tenet can truly be seen through the movement's collapse. Without a charismatic figure to guide the movement it stagnated and ultimately dissolved. The hierarchical structure associated with messianic movements in general, and specifically with Babism, act as a unifying force increasing the movement's durability and resilience.

Millenarianism acted as a significant motivating force as well. Just as the movement itself transformed in correspondence with the Bab's changing declarations, so too did millenarianism's role within it. Throughout the movement's early years, millenarianism acted as a unifying force, aiding in the movement's initial expansion and popularity. As the Bab's claims increased in stature, messianic fervor provoked many followers to raise up arms against the nonbelievers and ultimately face death in support of the cause. The transition from scholastic interest to revolutionary force is unique and will be examined in greater depth in the subsequent analysis.

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<sup>206</sup> Smith, Peter. *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. p. 5.

<sup>207</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 54.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p. 57. Amanat describes hints provided by both Ahsá'í and Rashtí as to the date of the Imam's return. Ahsá'í is quoted as providing the response "sixty-eight" when asked to "indicate the signs of deliverance."

## Iranian History

Shi'ism is inextricably linked to Iranian identity, and as such has acted as a seminal feature in shaping Iranian history. Iran's extensive history is a testament to the country's complicated relationship to its religious character. Abbas Amanat provides a rudimentary portrait of the past "seven overlapping historical episodes" in relation to Shi'ism in an effort to organize and document the impact religious progression has had on the country's development.<sup>209</sup>

**Table 1. Iranian Historical Episodes.**

Episode	Century	Trends
1	Eighth – Ninth	Proto-Shi'i trends at the time of the Shi'i imams.
	Ninth – Eleventh	Shi'i legal and hadith scholarship typified by the Persian Nawbakhti family.
2	Ninth – Thirteenth	Movements of dissent inspired by Zaydi and Isma'ili brands of Shi'ism against the caliphate.
3	Fourteenth - Sixteenth	Sufi-Shi'i trends of post-Mongol period with messianic expressions typified by the Safavid movement.
4	Seventeenth	Speculative endeavors of the philosophical schools of Isfahan and Shiraz.
5	Sixteenth - Nineteenth	Hadith and legal scholastic studies.
6	Nineteenth	Messianic aspirations beginning with the Shaykhi school, culminating in the Babi movement.
7	Twentieth	Modern developments in clerical and communal Shi'ism and the politicization of Iranian Islam, culminating in the Islamic Revolution.

The trends that emerge from such an effort depict the inherent adaptability associated with Shi'ism. Each episode, identified in Table 1, comprises periods in which "Shi'ism acted as an institutional force buttressing political power,"<sup>210</sup> and others when Shi'ism ultimately served to subvert political power.<sup>211</sup> Shi'ism is fully capable of "operating in more than one mode accommodating power when necessary, and even legitimizing it, or adversely rebelling against it by resorting to a vast reservoir of memories of suffering and resistance."<sup>212</sup> Shi'ism is malleable, able to incorporate a range of beliefs and traditions without losing sight of the core ideology – devotion to the House of the Prophet, and more specifically "love for the House of 'Ali'"<sup>213</sup> It is precisely this core ideology that has ultimately formed the crux of messianic manifestations in Shi'ism. The Mahdi is foretold to come from the Prophet's bloodline, but perhaps even more

<sup>209</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2009. p. 1-2. The following table is derived from this information.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 2. This was the case throughout the Buyid, Safavid, and the Qajar periods.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, p. 2. This was the case throughout the Saljuqid era (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries) as well as the Pahlavi period.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>213</sup> Hubbi Al-i 'Ali. Translated on p. 4.

importantly, it is the Qá'im<sup>214</sup> who “avenges all that went wrong in Shi'i sacred history,” ultimately restoring their position in this sacred context.<sup>215</sup> The anticipation surrounding the arrival of the Qá'im profoundly influences Iranian movements throughout history, and the Shaykhi school is no exception.

The doctrine and theories set forth by the Shaykhi school of thought was part of a wider concern with messianic themes within modern Iran. As is common in the years directly preceding the emergence of a messianic movement, dates come to hold great significance. The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam in the year 873-874 provided much inspiration for messianic prophecies as the millennial anniversary approached.<sup>216</sup> The impending anniversary, however, was not the only sign of the Imam's return. Nineteenth century Iran had no shortcoming of devastations that would have looked to many as the signs of the end times; recurring cholera and plague epidemics beginning in 1821;<sup>217</sup> Iranian defeat at the hands of, first, the Russians in 1813 and 1828, and subsequently the British in 1839; the increasing European presence and involvement in economic and political affairs; the destruction of the Shi'i holy cities first by the Wahhabis in 1802 and by the Turks in 1843. Many began to believe these events were associated with the second coming. Examples of emerging messianic thought can be found throughout the writings of Shaykhi students, such as Mullá Muhammad Hamza Sharí'atmadár, who considered the devastation wrought by these disasters as “a divine punishment for the ‘ulama’s negligence and hostility toward the true message of Shaykhism” and came as preparation “for the emergence of the Qá'im.”<sup>218</sup> These theories primarily emerged from the rural areas of Azerbaijan, especially as peasants from the area were exposed to the Shaykhi school of thought. As followers gained increasing assurance of the end times, attention shifted towards the character and the nature of the returning Imam. Another of Ahsá'í's followers, Hájjí Asadulláh Saysání began cautioning against the return of the Qá'im. Asadulláh preached of a more human image of the Imam. He believed that the returning Imam would appear by natural birth, living a normal life complete with suffering “at the hands of his enemies and the

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<sup>214</sup> Qá'im translates as “He Who Arises” and is a messiah-like figure in Shi'ism, similar to and often interchangeable with the Mahdi, but distinctly within the Shi'a tradition.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> According to the Hijri calendar this event occurred in the year 260.

<sup>217</sup> Mullá Muhammad Hamza Sharí'atmadár determined that the cholera and plague outbreaks in the 'Atabat during the 1830s eliminated nine-tenths of the surrounding population.

<sup>218</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 97. The Qá'im does represent the Mahdi, but through the distinct Shi'a belief.

opposition of the ‘ulama would be the best proof of his righteousness.”<sup>219</sup> In a sense, the restoration of the Imam’s humanity initiated a period of thought more accepting of legitimized claims that perhaps previously would have been denounced as heretical. No longer was the awaited Imam a prodigious individual with extraordinary powers, but an ordinary individual born of mortal parents that would restore justice with the support of his followers. As predictions such as these continued to emerge, the opportunity for future claimants became less problematic.

Post-Safavid Shi’ism underwent significant changes meant to distance itself from state patronage. First came the establishment of a clerical body whose authority was justified by the ‘ulama. The elitist attitude that accompanied this resurgence brought the group into repeated altercations with rival schools of thought, both internal and external to Shi’ism. With little effort these alternative schools of thought were reduced to a weakened state.<sup>220</sup> In this context, Shaykhism emerged “as the chief defender of theosophy and esoteric knowledge.”<sup>221</sup> The school of thought was able to fuse popular dissent into a more constant theology. As Shaykhism’s popularity grew so too did its opposition amongst the ‘ulama. This dissent pushed Shaykhism further from the Shi’ite academic world towards that of the nonconformists. The continuous persecution administered against them catapulted the group into an apocalyptic fervor, searching vigorously for the “gate through which the Imam’s presence could be grasped.”<sup>222</sup>

By the early nineteenth century, so sure was the ‘ulama of their power that they began to relinquish small privileges to the Shaykhis. The ‘ulama had become extremely adept in controlling the expansion of movements of dissent. They understood that anticipation of the Mahdi’s return could never be fully contained, particularly in the rural areas where heterodoxy thrived. As persecution of the Shaykhis increased so too did their desire for “some form of messianic advent, which they hoped could redeem them from the harassment and denunciation of their opponents.”<sup>223</sup> The status of the Shaykhi school was thrown into disarray with the death of Sayyid Kázim Rashtí. Without a formal successor identified, disciples were divided on the way ahead. Numerous claimants emerged, each offering an alternative vision. As one potential

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>220</sup> The remnants of the Akhbari school were defeated in the Atabat and their Iranian counterparts were reduced to minority status.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>222</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi’ism*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2009. p. 53.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p. 53.



successor amongst many, Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad Shírází offered many believers sufficient hope that the continued persecution would end with his arrival, fueling his sustained popularity.

Scholars have connected the rise and continued success of Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad and the Babi movement to more than simply his charismatic personality. Explicit changes in the local economy and political landscape led many potential followers to conversion. Many of the Babi converts from the merchant class had been from long-standing families in the field of commerce, much like the Bab himself. The early nineteenth century brought increased renewal, as new trade routes opened and foreign trade expanded. By the mid-1830s, however, the once thriving merchant business began to decline. A rise in European presence created open competition and as European goods flooded the market, traditionally stable prices began to rapidly fluctuate. European political presence further complicated the matter. With an increase in trade restrictions and tariffs, many European traders openly questioned whether local trade could survive.<sup>224</sup> Europeans were interested in more than trade through Persia. A long and tenuous history existed between Great Britain, France, and Russia in Persia; each country vying to secure their position and their appetite for expansion. Persia’s geographic position between “Europe and India [led many countries to believe that it would] play an important role in the future history of the East.”<sup>225</sup> Britain first sought to employ Persia against the Afghans, and subsequently to “neutralize French ambition” in the region in defense of the British position in India.<sup>226</sup> The Russians vied for clear access to the Indian Ocean. Persian leaders embraced Western interest and ideals, whereas skepticism permeated the lower classes. This period of rapid change would have most likely been viewed through a religious context by Persian merchants. The establishment of scholastic learning had already begun to blur the line between layman and mulla. Many younger individuals who had the opportunity to study in the madrasas “found it ever more gratifying to engage themselves, in conjunction with their business, in theological and mystical endeavors for which the esoteric discourses of Shaykhis and Sufis were the departure points.”<sup>227</sup>

Amanat focuses much of his research on the disciples of the Bab, assessing common characteristics in an effort to identify external influencers. The largest group of believers came

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<sup>224</sup> Letters from Persia, 53.

<sup>225</sup> Rawlinson, Sir Henry. *England and Russia in the East*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1875: xii.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>227</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 340.

from the religious class. Every member from this class had non-orthodox leanings prior to converting to Babism. The second largest group came from members of the merchant class and guilds. The merchants alongside the mullas and state officials formed the elite portion of the movement. State officials were especially prominent as Babi persecution increased because for a period of time they were able to provide some level of protection for followers in their communities. Quantitatively, the ratio of urban to rural was roughly equivalent to one to three. Amanat concludes that Babis constituted roughly four percent of the urban population and three percent of the rural.<sup>228</sup> As sectarian conflict and material decline increased, so too did the aggression of those living on the fringe of society.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 370 and Peter Smith “A Note on Babi and Baha’i Numbers in Iran” *Iranian Studies* 17 (Spring-Summer 1984) 295-301.

## Establishing a Revolutionary Ideology



Figure 7. Persia 1701.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Moll, Herman. *A System of Geography, or, a New & Accurate Description of the Earth in All Its Empires, Kingdoms, and States: Illustrated with History and Topography and Maps of Every Country*. London: Timothy Childe, 1701. This map is reproduced courtesy of the New York Public Library's Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division. The city of Shiraz is circled for ease of identification.

Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad Shírází was relatively unknown when he emerged in May 1844 proclaiming to be the Bab. In order to understand the popularity of his claims, it is first important to understand the experiences that potentially influenced his emerging principles. Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad was born to a merchant family in southern Iran. His paternal ancestors were sayyids from Shiraz, which lent some level of authenticity to his later claims, although lacked any significant material advantages.<sup>230</sup> Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s residence was in the Bázár-i Murgh quarter, “one of five Haydarí wards of Shiraz, probably the most important economic and religious quarter in the city.”<sup>231</sup> As was common during this period, the city was divided into two rival communities, Haydarí and Ni’matí, each of which controlled five quarters. Located in the center of the city, Bázár-i Murgh frequently housed disputes between rival gangs. The community remained unbiased as much as possible; however, they also began to band together in an attempt to distance themselves from the political power base. It was within this context that Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad gained his religious education. He attended the local Qur’anic school; however, following his father’s death, his uncle determined that he would discontinue future studies to focus on the merchant trade. Many critics often point to Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s poor education as a sign of his deception; however, Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad considered his abilities “as a divine merit demonstrating his intuitive knowledge.”<sup>232</sup>

Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad spent five years working as a commercial agent in Būshihr from 1835-1840.<sup>233</sup> As Amanat describes in detail, his family’s business generally followed the southern trade route, importing European and Indian wares particularly focused on cotton, wool, sugar, tea, coffee, and other luxury items, and exporting grains, dried fruits, seeds, tobacco, carpets and livestock.<sup>234</sup> Traditionally, trade represented a profitable profession; however, during this period a northern route opened, increasing competition and ultimately slowing business for many operating on the southern route. Market competition was not the only obstacle in the industry. Reliance on imports supplied primarily from Great Britain and its

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<sup>230</sup> Sayyid is an honorific title given to males accepted as descendants of the prophet Muhammad.

<sup>231</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 111.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>233</sup> According to the Hijra calendar, these events occurred between 1250 and 1256. The proximity to the millennium becomes increasingly significant when the Bab formally proclaims himself to be the Qá’im.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p. 121. Extensive descriptions of trade routes in southern Iran, and Būshihr in particular can be found in A.K.S. Lambton “Persian Trade under the Early Qajars” in *Islam and the Trade of Asia* (Oxford, 1970) 215-244; K.E. Abbott *Cities and Trade* 80-92 and 112-116 for details on the trade of Būshihr during this period.

colonies impeded commerce as well, particularly after British retribution for the perceived insurrection against British occupation.<sup>235</sup> Anti-British riots began to break out throughout the region in direct response, ultimately resulting in pressure to evacuate Būshihr altogether. Merchants were strongly opposed to the intensifying rift, attempting to mediate between the British and local governor with little impact due to the mounting hostility towards what was perceived as imperial oppression.

Scholars often speculate on the progression of Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s spiritual development during this period. Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s teachings, in their initial form, bore a striking resemblance to the Shaykhi school of thought. However, with Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s limited religious education the level of his exposure to the Shaykhi school is unknown. Many have conjectured that it was his time in Būshihr that initially exposed him to Shaykhi theosophy, ultimately leading him on his later path to the holy cities of Iraq where he studied under Rashtí for a brief time.<sup>236</sup> As Amanat points out, during this period Būshihr “was one of the strongholds of Akhbari ‘ulama of Bahrain,” who concerned themselves with the occult sciences and held a general austerity that many have associated with Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s character.<sup>237</sup> What is more, Ahsá’í and his successor Rashtí had regular contact with the Akhbari ‘ulama of Bahrain and the Al ‘Usfur family in Būshihr, providing a direct link to the Bab and potentially a basis for his specific manner of spiritual development.<sup>238</sup> With no definitive link between Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad and the Al ‘Usfur family, other than statements of high regard, no conclusions can be drawn. Although indirect, the connections are noteworthy due to the striking similarity between the Bab’s teachings and those of the Shaykhi school. By 1840, Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s evolving philosophy led him to embark on a religious pilgrimage to the holy cities of Iraq. The decision was denounced by his family; however, it does mark a significant departure in the primary focus of Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad’s life. From this point forward, Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad no longer concerned himself with material possessions. He became fascinated by the Shaykhi teachings, wishing not only to visit the shrine of the Imams, but also

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<sup>235</sup> Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the British focused their efforts on expanding Persian trade and safeguarding British interest in the Persian Gulf Region. Muhammad Shah, the ruler of Persia, revolted in May 1837 in an attempt to reassert Persian dominance in Herat. The British Indian Navy was deployed shortly thereafter to handle the situation and restore peace. For more information on this topic refer to Abbas Amanat’s work.

<sup>236</sup> Shaykhi theosophy specifically referring to the teachings about God and the world based on mystical insight.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

<sup>238</sup> The Bab speaks quite highly of the Al ‘Usfu family, of which many speculate he was influenced. However, no definitive link has been established through scholarship and thus can only be hypothesized.

attend the teaching circles of Rashtí. Upon his arrival in Iraq, many of Rashtí's students observed Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad's pious attitude and held him in high regard. There has been continuous debate on the degree to which Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad participated in the teaching circles during this eleven month period. This topic has become a point of contention due to the questions surrounding the level of his intuitive abilities. To many of his followers, this intuitive knowledge legitimized his claims. Significant scholarship exists on the debate surrounding the Bab's formal education. An examination of the Bayan reveals that Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad had a working knowledge of the Christian Gospels. As far as Shi'ite hadiths went, the Bab primarily focused on the works of Ahsá'í, and Rashtí. He elaborated on the Shaykhi intuitive approach for his method of ta'wil (hermeneutics).<sup>239</sup> For many scholars, the year the Bab spent in the 'Aatabat was enough to familiarize him with the Shaykhis, but not imbue a sense of deep connection.

His uncle Sayyid 'Ali made his way to Karbala specifically to bring Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad home. Upon his return, Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad quickly married Khadija Khanum and spent the next two years living a quiet life. These years marked the beginning of Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad's spontaneous intuition. He began to believe that he had been chosen for a divine mission. By 1844, Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad set about the difficult task of convincing his family of his divine connection.<sup>240</sup> According to his wife, those that witnessed the divine transformation could not help but believe; however, there were skeptics among them as well, those who believed his claims to be blasphemous pleaded with him to recant.<sup>241</sup> It is important to note that his early claims were well within the limits of reason, and could be accounted for by the construct of sainthood. It was this humble beginning that made Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad's declarations all the more convincing. Piety, devotion, and self-instruction: these are the characteristics that established him as a prophetic figure and heralded an age where learned traditions and popular desires merged within his movement.

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<sup>239</sup> Ta'wil refers to distinguishing the inner and esoteric meanings and interpretation of the often ambiguous and difficult verses of the Qur'an.

<sup>240</sup> According to the Hijra calendar, this event occurred in the year 1260, two millennia after the Imam entered Occultation.

<sup>241</sup> Amanat, Abbas. p. 149 citing "from the yet un-traced narrative of Mulla Muhammad Taqi Hashtrudi.

## Babi Rising

It was Rashtí's death on 2 January 1844 that propelled the Bab's movement into the realm of legitimacy. In the end, Rashtí's reluctance to formally name a successor splintered the group, leaving an opening for the radicals to fill. Rashtí proclaimed Mulla Hasan Gauhar caretaker of the faith for a period not to exceed forty five days, after which the Promised One would emerge. When the Promised One had not emerged, Gauhar attempted to hold the group together with little success. There were potential candidates, such as Hajji Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani, who focused his teachings on Shaykhism as a scholastic discipline, or Mirza Muhit Kirmani who claimed to be the guardian of Rashtí's family and thus secured his place alongside Gauhar as caretaker of the faith. However, their reluctance to acknowledge the messianic dimension of the Shaykhi school left many followers who were eagerly awaiting the Promised One's arrival with few options. As a result, many began to rely on Mullā Husayn Bushrū'ī as their primary representative. He was the prototypical Shaykhi, characterizing the messianic yearnings so rampant during this period.

Due to his significant impact on the Babi movement, it is vital to provide select background information on Mullā Husayn and his character. He was born in Zīrak near Bushrūyih, “a small agricultural town on the edge of the Khurasan desert” sometime around 1814.<sup>242</sup> He was educated in the local madrasa until his twelfth birthday when he was sent to Mashhad to study at the madrasa of Mīrzā Ja'far. He was a student of Bihbahānī, a distinguished Usūlī.<sup>243</sup> Mullā Husayn eventually moved to Isfahan to study with Usūlī jurists, and it is during this period that he became acquainted with Ahsá'í and Rashtí's teachings. The other Shaykhi students held great admiration for Mullā Husayn and he was eventually entrusted with the task of supervising junior pupils. Following Rashtí's death, Mullā Husayn felt obliged to participate in the debates surrounding the future of the Shaykhi school. He retired to the mosque of Kūfa to reflect on the larger truths surrounding the identity of their future leader.<sup>244</sup> It was on his return to Iran through Shiraz that he met Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad for the first time and after recognizing

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<sup>242</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 156. He was born in 1229 according to the Hijra calendar.

<sup>243</sup> Usūlī's are the majority Twelver Shi'a group. They differ from the Akhbari group in their use of ijtihad, which is the belief in the creation of new rules of fiqh; in the use of hadiths to exclude those traditions that they deem unreliable; and in their obligation to obey a mujtahid when seeking to determine Islamic customs and behavior.

<sup>244</sup> The practice of i'tikaf was not entirely unique for Shaykhis and was engaged in from time to time in an effort to explore the truth by abstinence from earthly desires. p. 163.

him as the Promised One promptly joined him as one of his first disciples. This conversion was not instantaneous, but resulted after an exchange lasting several days. Mullā Husayn attributed this period of disbelief to his scholastic values, which he could not at first see within Sayyid ‘Alī Muhammad, who lacked the proper education. It appears to be the combination of the two men, one who desperately wanted to perceive the messianic signs, the other with a genuine belief in his own divine inspiration that resulted in the movement’s progression. The two men relied on one another and as such influenced each other greatly. The scholarship regarding the genesis of the Babi movement identifies this moment as one of the most significant. Even though the Bab’s objectives were not yet apparent, this moment marked the birth of the messianic movement.<sup>245</sup>

During this early stage, “recognition was less a commitment to a set of ideas and beliefs than devotion to the person of the Bab as a charismatic saint.”<sup>246</sup> The initial disciples helped shape the movement into the predefined framework of Shaykhi prophecies. Mullā Husayn began preaching in the mosque of Īlkhānī, near Sayyid ‘Alī Muhammad’s home, and managed to attract a number of Shaykhis to the movement. Eighteen individuals were initiated during a one month period from late May to early July. Each came from a similarly humble background, which most likely encouraged an environment that cultivated social cohesion. Each disciple received a specific role within the movement, which allowed for some division of leadership. The Bab identified the early disciples as “the symbolic return of the holy men of the past.”<sup>247</sup> These roles continued to transform in accordance with the Bab’s changing character. The Bab intended this framework as the blueprint for his following on earth.

As justification for the Babi movement, the Bab and his disciples relied on past prophecies. The more improbable aspects that they believed to be unachievable were ignored; however, the remaining doctrine was internalized and ultimately influenced all future plans. The believers came to focus on three specific tasks: “to inform those elements who because of a similar outlook were likely to recognize the Bab; to prepare the public for the general declaration; and to address the religious and secular authorities.”<sup>248</sup> These objectives would be fulfilled through a series of steps taken by the Bab and his disciples. His disciples were to disperse widely, mobilizing support for the cause; the Bab would travel to Mecca and announce

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<sup>245</sup> This topic is explored in great depth by both Abbas Amanat, and Peter Smith.

<sup>246</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 173.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p. 190. The Bab identified these roles in a letter written around 1846-1847.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. p. 197.



the Imam's arrival; they would gather together again at the 'Atabāt to prepare themselves for the next steps. Each step was to be carried out simultaneously. There is no doubt that the primary source for these prophecies came from the Shi'ite Traditions; however, Amanat detects Christian influences as well, particularly in the speech delivered in 1844 prior to their departure in fulfillment of their divine missions. The Bab selected particular passages from the Gospels to use in his teaching, emphasizing the impending millennium.<sup>249</sup> This goes beyond traditional Muslim knowledge of Christian texts. Undoubtedly the Bab could relate to Christ's message of self-sacrifice and love, which more closely aligned with the Bab's teachings than the vengeful Mahdi depicted in traditional Shi'ite prophecies. However, this influence did not impact his firm commitment to Shi'ism. Even from the beginning, he viewed his role as ultimately surpassing the traditional Shaykhi characterization of the Perfect Shi'a.<sup>250</sup> Throughout his early claims, the Bab and his disciples often equated his position with that of the Hidden Imam's. His first book *Qayyūm al-Asmā* was accorded the status of divine revelation, traditionally not even provided to the writings of the religious authorities. Most scholars agree that ambiguity shrouds these initial claims, and at least to some degree the Bab was laying the foundation for his later assertions of Mahdihood. Amanat believes that the uncertainty shrouding his claims in conjunction with the Bab's reluctance to fully commit to his purported station presented one of the major impediments to the early expansion of the movement.<sup>251</sup> However shrouded in metaphors these early claims were, they represented a direct departure from Shi'ite doctrine and could not prevent the onslaught of negative attention they provoked.

By the summer of 1844, the Bab and his disciples had determined the most appropriate method of alerting potential followers to the Bab's arrival. The disciples were to prepare the public for the Bab's arrival, without mentioning any identifying characteristics. The disciples traditionally taught "that the báb'l-imám had appeared and would shortly enter Karbalá to fulfill

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<sup>249</sup> He is quoted as saying "Ye are even as the fire which in the darkness of the night has been kindled upon the mountain-top. Let your light shine before the eyes of men... You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? ... The Heavenly Father is ever with you and keeps watch over you ... and will exalt you above all the rulers and kings of the world." Compare this to Matthew V, 14-16; XI, 27; V, 13; X, 11-14, 20 and also Luke IX, 5.

<sup>250</sup> In his book *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, Peter Smith describes the Bab's early claims as implying "that he occupied some higher spiritual station" than simply acting as the "bearer of esoteric knowledge of the Imams" (14). Similarly, Abbas Amanat believes his early claims were constrained, but that he would continuously "allude to the status that inwardly he claimed for himself." *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 199.

<sup>251</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 201.

the messianic prophecies and lend support to the Qá'im," whose advent would soon occur.<sup>252</sup> His work, *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, provided the foundational message that the disciples would preach, and identified the audiences to target with this message – “the rulers, the ‘ulama, and the public, presumably all at once.”<sup>253</sup> Each disciple was provided with the general assignment of converting potential followers, a few of the Bab’s most trusted disciples were given key locations to focus on. His most trusted disciple, Mullā Husayn, was assigned to Iran to specifically inform Muhammad Sháh and his chief minister, while simultaneously focusing his efforts on the residents of Isfahan, Tehran, and Khurasan. Mullā Yūsuf Ardabīlī was told to return to his homeland in Azerbaijan, travelling to Iraq with his converts. A large group of disciples were assigned to Iraq. Mullā ‘Alī Bastāmī was sent to prepare the way in the ‘Atabāt, announcing the Bab’s claims to Shaykh Muhammad Hasan an-Najfī, one of the leading Shi’i clerics. The Bab planned to travel to the Hijāz later in the year.

For the most part, the disciples were reported to have great success beyond simply the Shaykhi community. There were difficulties as well, especially in the dialogues with the rulers and the ‘ulama. The movement’s first true obstacle occurred in the ‘Atabat. Bastāmī met with severe resistance from the prominent Usūlī ‘ulama, Shaykh Muhammad Hasan an-Najfī in Najaf and Sayyid Ibrāhīm Qazvīnī in Karbalā. Sayyid Kazim Rashtī believed that many of the mujtahids opposed the emerging initiatives because of the growing popularity associated with Shaykhism. The prevalence of Shaykhism threatened the mujtahid’s authority and caused them to fear that “the public may abandon their obedience.”<sup>254</sup> Bastāmī’s claims infuriated the Shaykh, who condemned him as a heretic and pronounced the Bab’s writings as blasphemy. It was not until October 1844 that local leadership was able to alert Turkish authorities to the potential hazards associated with Bastāmī’s assertions. Muhammad Hasan’s supporters arrested Bastāmī and delivered him to the Turkish authorities in hopes of quelling any open dissent. Turkish authorities transferred him to Baghdad for further questioning. Bastāmī’s arrest sensationalized the matter, diverting attention from the Bab’s claims and highlighting the complicated nature of Sunni-Shi’ite relations. Friction existing between the government-backed

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<sup>252</sup> Smith, Peter. *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1987. p. 15.

<sup>253</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 211.

<sup>254</sup> Rashtī, Sayyid Kāzim. *Dalīl al-Mutahayyirīn*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Kirman, n.d. p. 90 (Persian trans. by Muhammad Rizā. Tehran, n.d., English trans. by Abbas Amanat *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 218.

Sunni ‘ulama and the persecuted Shi’ite citizenry seethed beneath the surface of every debate surrounding Bastāmī’s trial.

The governor of Iraq, Najīb Pāshā, was known for his ferocity and his discriminatory policies toward the Shi’ites. Pro-Iranian Shi’ites were especially skeptical of Najīb’s tactics, fearing that his policies would eliminate their personal liberties. Najīb’s governorship was marked by numerous complications; among the most prominent were “resistance to the Ottoman legal system in the Holy Cities, persistence of the mujtahids in maintaining some form of autonomy, [and] dissatisfaction of the Persian merchant community in Baghdad with the newly imposed levies.”<sup>255</sup> Najīb was especially harsh on citizens that defied Ottoman authority. As a result, many of the leading Shi’ite ‘ulama such as Shaykh Muhammad Hasan an-Najfī and Sayyid Ibrāhīm Qazvīnī aligned themselves with Najīb in hopes of evading his severe rulings.

The case of Bastāmī provided the “low-ranking tullāb, Persian merchants, and all those who detested the mujtahids’ compromise with the Turks” with an outlet for their mounting frustrations.<sup>256</sup> Viewing this case as a religious one, Najīb referred to the Sunni ‘ulama before announcing his punishment, for which they recommended death. Fearing that this verdict would threaten the volatile peace, Najīb determined it would be best to defer judgment pending further investigation. The governor of Kirmānshāh, Muhibb ‘Alī Khān Mākū’ī pleaded with Najīb to release Bastāmī to Tehran for punishment. Muhibb ‘Alī Khān went so far as to alert the British consulate in hopes that they would be able to halt the impending execution. British intervention had succeeded in the past, but Najīb refused to acknowledge any foreign involvement in such a case. According to Najīb, any subject inhabiting Turkey was “in civil, criminal, and religious matters, entirely subject to Ottoman law, and that neither the Persian government, nor the Consuls of that power, nor the High Priests of the [Shi’ite] sect have any further protective privilege than that of seeing justice duly administered according to the forms and usages of [Sunni] tribunals.”<sup>257</sup> Najīb assembled a Court of Inquisition on 13 January 1845 with “twenty prominent Sunni ‘ulama and twelve of their Shi’ite counterparts,” believing that if the verdict

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<sup>255</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 221.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p. 222.

<sup>257</sup> Great Britain, Foreign Office. Volumes of diplomatic and consular correspondence and other reports preserved in the Public Record Office, London. F.O. 248 series, vols. 114, no. 1. Collected and transcribed by Abbas Amanat.

was not to his liking he could simply overrule it and send the case to Istanbul.<sup>258</sup> Thirty of the participants signed the fatwā, depicting the overwhelming consensus on this subject. The Sunni signatories believed that death was an appropriate punishment for the blasphemous nature of the text, *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and the messenger responsible for delivering the text. The Shi'ite signatories, however, did not specify a punishment for the blasphemer and his disciples, believing that “the book by itself could not be regarded as a piece of firm evidence, so long as its bearer was unaware of its contents and did not believe in its claims, it was impossible to pass a sentence of death.”<sup>259</sup> Sir Henry Rawlinson notes that “after much discussion the [Sunni] law officers adjudged the culprit to be convicted of blasphemy and passed sentence of death on him accordingly, while the [Shi'ites] returned a verdict, that he was only guilty of dissemination of blasphemy and liable in consequence to no heavier punishment than imprisonment or banishment.”<sup>260</sup> However eager both sides were to come to some resolution in the case, Bastāmī remained in prison for three more months before any judgment from Istanbul reached Baghdad. Both believers and nonbelievers alike anxiously awaited the manifestation of the Imam, predicted to occur during Bastāmī's imprisonment. However, the predicted day came and went without incident, and in conjunction with the Bab's cancelled journey to the 'Atabat, many of the most avid converts became bitterly disappointed. By April 1845, Bastāmī's transfer to Constantinople was secured. He never arrived. Some believe he fell ill and died on the journey, while others treat him as a martyr, believing him to have been poisoned. The most reliable account documents his arrival in the imperial dockyard for hard labor, but he died before his release.<sup>261</sup> This episode is most important for its substantiation of the Shaykhi community's desire to believe in a Savior. It also demonstrated to the extreme, the reaction that could be expected from the religious establishment following the Babi proclamations.

Beginning in September 1846, the Bab spent the next eighteen months in seclusion in the shelter of Manuchihr Khan Mu'tamad al-Daula, the governor of Isfahan. At the Bab's

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<sup>258</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 225.

<sup>259</sup> Tunkābunī, Mīrzā Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān. *Qisas al-'Ulamā*. Tehran, 1304/1886. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Tehran, n.d. p. 186. English trans. by Abbas Amanat *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 232.

<sup>260</sup> Great Britain, Foreign Office. Volumes of diplomatic and consular correspondence and other reports preserved in the Public Record Office, London. F.O. 248 series, vols. 114, no. 2. Collected and transcribed by Abbas Amanat.

<sup>261</sup> Abbas Amanat *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 237.

instruction, one of his supporters had added the name ‘Ali Muhammad to the call to prayer, inciting such outcry from the public that he was arrested upon his arrival in Shiraz in late June 1845. The Bab was quickly brought to the Vakil mosque and ordered to renounce all claims. Ultimately he avoided death by denying all claims to the position of *babiya* to the satisfaction of the local Shaykh. He was put under house arrest with few intermediaries to notify him of local events. A local cholera epidemic provided the opportunity to escape to Isfahan once again in September 1846. Although somewhat restricted in his public appearances during this period, the Bab was able to meet with potential converts in an effort to secure a widespread dissemination of his message. As the Babi movement continued to expand, it garnered attention from the religious authorities in Iran. The bitter condemnation that followed his increased popularity was not surprising. In late May 1847 the Bab was sentenced to exile in the mountains of western Azerbaijan for his crimes. En route the caravan stopped in Tabriz, where the Bab sought an audience with the Shah, believing that he had been wrongly persecuted. Unlike the revolutionary leaders of the Christian messianic movements reviewed earlier, the Bab chose to operate as much as possible within the formal jurisdiction of the state. His disciples pleaded with the Bab to let them attempt a rescue; however, the Bab believed that once the local leaders recognized the truth behind his claims he would be released. The Shah’s disregard of the Bab’s requests led the latter to believe that perhaps the Shah’s brother would provide a more active ear. The Bab offered his support to the Shah’s brother in return for the opportunity to remain in Tabriz. The prince, realizing the potential advantages of the Bab as an ally, began questioning the Tabriz clergy for their reaction. The Shaykhi and the Usūlī ‘ulama were unrelenting in their hatred, refusing to grant the Bab an audience, securing his fate.

In early July, the Bab began his journey to the remote fortress in Mākū to serve out his sentence. Much to the state authorities’ surprise, many of the Bab’s disciples travelled to Mākū as well. Security was lax, and the Bab was allowed to correspond and visit with his disciples with minimal supervision. It was during this period that he accomplished some of his most prolific writings. He compiled portions of the Persian Bayān, and “wrote an apologia, *Dalā’il-i Sab’a* (the Seven Proofs), in defense of his claims.”<sup>262</sup> Confronted with almost certain death, the previous attempts at denial and self-protection were transformed into outright rebelliousness. It is here that the Bab made his first open claim to his position as the Qá’im in the Qā’imīya

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 375.

sermon. Such open insurrection could not be tolerated by the state authorities, nor could his continuous outpouring of guests. In late March 1848, the Bab's devoted disciple Mullā Husayn arrived in Mākū shortly after receiving the Qā'imīya sermon. Mullā Husayn once again requested the Bab's consent to an armed resistance amongst the Babis in Iran. Drawing on the support garnered from the Bab's predictions, Mullā Husayn acquired responsibility for mobilizing the movement. The Bab formally replaced Mullā Husayn's title with the position of Babu'l-Bab, the Gate of the Gate. The Bab called his disciples to proceed to the land of Khā [Khurasan]. Those receiving the call interpreted it as the preamble to the final fitna.<sup>263</sup>

Apprehension continued to grow among the state authorities, encouraging the decision to transfer the Bab in April 1848 to the remote castle of Chihriq. Stricter enforcement on the part of the guards made it increasingly difficult for the Bab to communicate with the few followers that made the difficult journey to the remote castle.

Three months after his arrival, the Bab was once again summoned to Tabriz to stand trial before the 'ulama. He was escorted by way of Urūmīya, a small town less attuned to the general Persian religiosity, making it ripe to receive the Babi message. Crowds gathered to hear him speak, and as Austin Wright notes, many of them were "mysteriously moved and burst into tears."<sup>264</sup> Around this time, fierce quarrels began breaking out between Babis and the orthodox followers to the point that the state authorities gave orders that all Babis "should be arrested, and punished with beatings and fines."<sup>265</sup> The 'ulama of Tabriz believed the outbreaks to be "ominous signs of the imminent insurgency already promised by the Bab."<sup>266</sup> The state authority hoped to dissuade any militant action on the part of the Babis through a public trial of their leader in an attempt to humiliate and discredit him. However, many of the Shaykhi and Usūlī 'ulama began to fear for their lives, hiring armed escorts and reinforcing their homes with extensive barriers to protect themselves from what they believed to be the impending Babi threat. The Bab finally arrived in Tabriz in July 1848 among a feverish anticipation. As the concern for a Babi retaliation continued to grow, "the majority of the 'ulama in the city followed the example

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 379. Fitna generally refers to a civil war at a time involving trials of faith, similar to the Tribulation in Christian eschatology.

<sup>264</sup> Momen, Moojan. *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944, Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford: George Ronald Publishers, 1981. p. 73.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>266</sup> Abbas Amanat. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 386.

of their counterparts in Isfahan and refused to participate in the tribunal.”<sup>267</sup> Shaykhis were among the few to participate. The questioning centered on the nature of his claims thus far. When pressed, the Bab proclaimed “I am that person whom you have been expecting for more than a millennium ... I am the Lord of the Command (Sāhib al-Amr) whose return was yearned for from the dawn of Islam.”<sup>268</sup> The Bab’s claims caught the court off guard, generating intense debate amongst the ‘ulama. The trial ended without resolution for either side. The state authorities had hoped to convert the Bab’s disciples by humiliating him and displaying his ignorance. However, his assertion served only to solidify his followers’ beliefs. In order to avoid an outright rebellion the state authorities urged the religious leaders to be moderate in their sentencing. The state authorities advised that the Bab be examined by a physician to determine his state of mind. By declaring him insane, they hoped that they would avoid having to execute him and could sustain the peace a while longer. After fierce debate, the religious authorities agreed to issue a conditional fatwā against him, established by his apostasy that would result in his death upon proof of his sanity. The provincial authorities directed the crown prince’s physician to examine the Bab and determine “whether he was of sane mind or merely a madman.”<sup>269</sup> The physician, Dr. William Cormick later recalled that his “report to the shah at that time was of a nature to spare [the Bab’s] life.”<sup>270</sup> Their medical opinion successfully spared the Bab from execution. Nevertheless, Mīrzā ‘Alī Asghar continued to insist that the Bab be subjected to some form of corporeal punishment. The official report states that after his lashings, the Bab recanted and asked for pardon. Much debate surrounds this account because it was not dated or signed as most official reports were. Most scholars agree that this was most likely fabricated in an attempt to save face and further humiliate the Bab.

The summer of 1848 represented a transformation in the Babi movement. As the trial concluded, the conference of Badasht and Mullā Husayn’s “march at the head of a Babi contingent on 22 July 1848” began.<sup>271</sup> Just as the Bab’s declaration at his trial reinvigorated and inspired his followers, these two events also served to formally organize the resistance and break with traditional Islam. Mullā Husayn’s sole intention was to rescue the Bab; whereas the

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p. 387.

<sup>268</sup> Browne, Edward G. *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*. Cambridge, 1918. p. 252.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, p. 261.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Abbas Amanat. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 393.

assembly at Badasht asserted Babi independence from the Islamic system. It was becoming obvious that the revolutionary spirit, so feared by the state authorities, was spreading amongst the Babi masses. The delicate state of affairs in the capital and in Azerbaijan restrained the government from responding to these incidents with the force necessary to halt their progress. The government also feared that any action taken against the Bab would only ignite a revolutionary retaliation from his followers.

It was in this context that Nāsir al-Dīn Mīrzā ascended to the throne in September 1848, following the death of Muhammad Shāh. The rise of Nāsir al-Dīn Mīrzā resulted in the appearance of Mīrzā Taqī Khān Amīr Kabīr to power as premier. The conflict that had originated in Bārfurūsh between the Babi followers and their adversaries quickly advanced into the insurgency of Tabarsī from October 1848 to May 1849. The seven month siege of Tabarsī represented a significant turning point in Babi history. It has been commonly accepted by many historians that insurrection was the general goal, although the symbolic role this struggle most likely assumed for the numerous clerics and theological students cannot be overlooked. The ideal represented through Imam Husayn's struggles and martyrdom inspired many Babis as they took up arms against the nonbelievers. The Babis were extremely successful throughout the early months; however, as starvation took its toll and continued combat devastated their ranks, many surviving Babis fell victim to a false truce. Once they agreed to lay down their weapons, they were slaughtered and the survivors enslaved. From this point forward the Babi movement was treated as an insurrection by the state authorities. This shift also served to strengthen Amīr Kabīr's resolve and the formation of his devastating policies of centralization, eliminating the need to tolerate Babi insurrection.

The next two years were relatively quiet for the Bab. Following the Babi insurrection, strict security measures were enforced. However, the Bab was still able to communicate with his followers, albeit through increasingly creative means. Throughout this time, he continued to believe that his religion would ultimately triumph. The defeat of the Tabarsī insurgency and the deaths of his most prominent disciples came as a shock to the Bab and had a profound impact on his morale. By the middle of 1850, the Babi resistance in Zanjān was quickly collapsing.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Zanjān is a small town halfway between Tehran and Tabriz in the north of Iran. This siege was by far the largest of the battles that broke out between the Babis and the government troops. Led by Hujjat-i Zanjani, two thousand Babi fighters held part of the town for approximately nine months. Fewer than one hundred Babis survived to face execution. Fighting is said to have broken out because of an imprisoned Babi accused of murdering a Muslim.



Rejecting the earlier accommodating tactics, the new premier was completely uncompromising. Babis were routinely harassed in an attempt to eradicate the heretical movement. The suppression of the Babi insurgencies paved the way for the Bab's eventual execution. In June 1850, the Bab was transferred to Tabriz. By his arrival on June 19<sup>th</sup>, the premier had come to the conclusion that the Bab's death was the only way to prevent future insurgencies. He hoped that the Bab's execution would "demonstrate to the Babis, and their sympathizers, the futility of any future defiance of the overriding power of the state."<sup>273</sup> As knowledge of a Babi plot to assassinate the premier surfaced, his decision became ever more resolute. The premier desperately sought the approval of the 'ulama of Tabriz in order to legitimize his actions. The 'ulama were hesitant to provide their approval to the premier, whose anticlerical policies concerned them, especially at a time when the Babi insurgency was underway with 5,000 Babis armed and ready to defend their leader. The 'ulama continued to fear that the Bab's execution might ignite greater defiance. Confronted with these severe reservations, Amīr Kabīr asked his brother Mīrzā Hasan Khān, the secretary of the army of Azerbaijan, to carry out the Bab's execution. By bypassing the governor, Amīr Kabīr hoped that he would force the hands of the mujtahids. The premier's plan succeeded and three weeks later the Bab was taken to the houses of the three chief mujtahids to receive the final fatwā. Each mujtahid sentenced him to death on the grounds of apostasy, believing the Bab's ultimate ambition "was to possess the throne and take over the state and the monarchy."<sup>274</sup> Following the issuance of the fatwās on 9 July 1850, the Bab was paraded around the bazaar before being brought to the square for public execution in an effort to intimidate the public and demonstrate the government's full control. The execution was carried out by firing squad, in order to avoid public condemnation of a single executioner. The squad discharged three volleys of bullets, and when the smoke cleared the Bab was nowhere to be found. A misfired shot severed the rope, releasing the Bab to safety. The squad searched the area, locating him in an adjacent room unharmed. The guards dragged him back to the square and shot him. His body was hauled through the streets fastened to a ladder for everyone to see. Afterwards he was thrown into a ditch outside of the city walls.

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Hujjat sent an armed party to the prison in an attempt to release him by force. The next day the governor sent a group to kidnap Hujjat during prayer. The Babi guards repulsed the attack, but siege began quickly after.

<sup>273</sup> Abbas Amanat. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 396.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, p. 400.

The question remains why none of the Bab's followers attempted to halt the execution. Scholars point to Amīr Kabīr's policy of intimidation. Many of the Bab's followers were specifically targeted for arrest and execution in response to declaring their loyalty to the Bab. Knowing the risks, the Bab urged passivity and renouncement to his followers. The Bab's execution robbed the movement of a charismatic leader, quickening its collapse. The premier's resolve and decisive action reduced it to a heresy. Recognizing the true extent of the Bab's human frailty, the public no longer expected the miracles he once promised. Their sympathy quickly turned to hostility. Without a designated successor and no clear direction, the Babis were forced to disperse. Many claimants arose throughout this period, the majority of which yearned for retaliatory action. The struggles of the last few years radicalized many of the Bab's former followers. They attempted an assassination of Nāsir al-Dīn Mīrzā in Shawwāl in August 1852 unsuccessfully, which dealt the movement its final setback. Many Babis were subsequently hunted down and executed in a frenzied spree. Bahā'ullāh, one of the leading Babis, managed to escape. He travelled to Iraq and began teaching a message of peace and ethics. Following the persecutions of 1852, many of the believers became weary of the violence continuously afflicting their ranks, finding refuge in Bahā'ullāh's message. The messianic militancy of the Babi movement transformed into a pacifist, nonpolitical sect that "came to represent revisionist tendencies [in an attempt] to achieve further religious innovation by means of moral aptitude and adoption of modern social reforms."<sup>275</sup>

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The Bab and his message inspired a diverse mix of individuals, including the 'ulama, members of the merchant class, Sufis, and small landowners. It had not been since the Nuqtavīs in the early seventeenth century that a "religious movement of protest achieved such a degree of popularity and social mobilization."<sup>276</sup> Prior to Rashti's death, Shaykhism was extraordinarily popular, providing a grassroots foundation and network for Babi conversion. Although the close association of the Bab's message to Shaykhi teachings offered an ideal foundation for potential converts, the Ahl'i Haqq and other extremists provided a close second in terms of mass conversions. The deep rooted messianic expectations for many of these nonconformist minority factions fit nicely within the Bab's message. The heterodoxies that had continued to survive in

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid, p. 414.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, p. 333.

post-Safavid Iran found common ground in Babist ideals, particularly as a “shield against the pressure of the majority religion.”<sup>277</sup> This movement had great potential not only to survive, but also to thrive against the conformity of popular religion and oppression. The Bab served as the central figure and “symbol of sanctity” that cemented these often disparate groups together.<sup>278</sup> Especially unique to the movement was the sense of equality instilled in its members. The Babi ‘ulama presented not only a source of support, guidance and protection to Babis, but acted as peers in the undertaking. The desire for religious reform was ever-present during this period. In some ways, a collision between Amīr Kabīr and the Babis was inevitable. Both desired some level of religious reform but sought resolution in different ways. Amīr Kabīr attempted an authoritarian approach, eliminating all movements of dissent, whereas the Bab sought a grassroots religious renewal. By removing the Babi threat, the Qajars were reaffirmed as the “sole arbiters of religious norms.”<sup>279</sup>

Babism attempted to offer an alternative to the standards so strictly enforced by the religious and secular authorities. The Bab’s belief in progressive revelation allowed the movement to reinvigorate a theory present in the old Shi’ite thought. The claims to deputyship of the Hidden Imam offered a people threatened by external imposition of the European ideologies an opportunity to cope with the appearance and subjugation of an advanced culture. Babism emerged at a critical juncture when exposure to Western customs and ideals was just beginning. For this reason, Babism seemed to represent “the last chance for an indigenous reform movement before [Persian] society became truly affected by the consequences of the Western predominance, first in material and then in ideological spheres.”<sup>280</sup> At its core, the Babi movement contained the spirit of rebellion against the social injustice so prevalent during this period of change. Their condemnations resonated throughout the ranks; however, their ideas about the methods of attaining change varied widely. The moderates, like the Bab himself, sought to work within the current social structure, whereas the militants saw the movement as a vehicle to purge society of the oppressive institutions. This desire to operate within the existing social structure was especially unique to this movement. Initially the Bab did not intend to create a new religion. He sought to reexamine and redefine the stagnating religious norms. With

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid, p. 371.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p. 370.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, p. 406.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p. 413.

the failure to produce concrete results, the moderates began to consider radical actions as well. The increasing persecutions and harassment hastened this transition.

Upon reflection, there appear to be a number of recurring themes that deserve comment. As was the case in Münster, Babism continued to attract followers and thrive due to the recurring trend of permissive authority. Fear crippled both religious and political authorities. Although the Bab was detained for most of the movement's existence, the notion that his followers would unite and devastate their communities prevented the mujtahid from executing him. He was able to maintain regular contact with his followers through sermons and letters, continuing to provide guidance and counseling. It was not until Amīr Kabīr specifically targeted the movement, advising that all followers be imprisoned or killed that the movement's power diminished. The second feature has been discussed at length, the Bab as a charismatic authority and the importance of his position to the movement. A third factor was the reversal of status for many individuals throughout this period. Merchants in particular were deeply affected by the increased competition from an expanding European presence and additional trade routes. The Bab's teachings offered these merchants some relief during the tumultuous times. A fourth motivating factor was the continuous persecution faced by Babism, which rather than instilling fear, served as a source for unification, bringing followers closer together. Elitism played a role as well, although at least in its initial form it did not manifest itself in a militant manner. Through the revelation of divine law, the Bab did dictate a significant division between believers and non-believers. Believers were advised to avoid all contact with non-believers and marriage was strictly prohibited. As persecution increased, so too did the militant element associated with Babi elitism. Antinomianism played a role as well, at least in the Bayān. It was most likely restrained by the continuous persecution followers faced. The level of mysticism associated with Shi'ism in general added to the overall expectation of the Mahdi's return. Each of these factors played a significant role in the development of the Babi movement. With followers dispersed across the country and subject to continuous discrimination, these fundamental tenets aided in the movement's fortitude and continued progression.

## **The Mahdi Rebellion**

The events that occurred in the Sudan from 1881 until 1885 fascinated the imposing colonial powers for years, inspiring tales of adventure in the exotic locale. It was not until the early 1950s that scholars began to reconsider the impact of the Mahdist movement and a formal collection of surviving observations began. Within an Islamic framework, this movement served as a revitalizing force of fundamentalist ideals that ultimately developed into a theocratic state, surviving for almost two decades. For perhaps one of the first times in modern history, a fundamentalist religious movement threw off the yoke of Egyptian imperialism, establishing themselves as a cohesive nation. The resurgence of Islamic activism adds weight to a cursory examination of Sunni Mahdism in a fundamentalist context.

## **Origins and Doctrine**

As a Sunni movement, the Mahdi rebellion originated within the larger context of Sunni interpretations of messianic prophecies. As such, a number of differences between Sunni and Shi'i perceptions of the Mahdi's role must be discerned. For the most part, the Mahdi has been a somewhat minor figure in Sunni Islam. According to the Sunni interpretation, the Mahdi's foremost directive centers on the return to Islam in its purest form, as it was at the time of the Prophet. The Sunni Mahdi, more than anything, "was believed to be a divinely guided and appointed agent for renewal (mujaddid), in contrast with the more illuminationist and incarnationist Shi'a ideas."<sup>281</sup> The Sunni Mahdi does not question the validity of the sharī'a in its current form, only the adherence to it during periods of perceived moral laxity. His function is to "support and restore the Sunna of the community, not to transcend or destroy it."<sup>282</sup> This forms the crux of the Mahdi's ideology. In theory, the Sunni Mahdi would agree with the 'ulama's authority, but not with their permissive and lenient interpretation of Islamic tradition. The Mahdi acts as the renewer of Islam, leading to a restoration of Islam to its previous austerity. This interpretation is in direct contrast to the Shi'i understanding as demonstrated in the previous analysis. The Shi'i believe in the continuous presentation of divine guidance over time, augmenting the current religious knowledge with evolving insight. In this way the Shi'i Mahdi is similar to the Prophet, and is often interpreted as the initiator of a new religious

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<sup>281</sup> Voll, John. "The Sudanese Mahdi: Frontier Fundamentalist." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 10.2 (1979): 153.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, p. 153.

dispensation.<sup>283</sup> As a direct result, Shi'i messianic movements are more apt to result in new interpretations of doctrine and a distinct break with Islam unlike their Sunni counterparts.

An examination of the Sunni Mahdi would be incomplete without first mentioning the broader fundamentalist framework from which Sunni Mahdism often emerges. This framework emphasizes (1) a standardization of Islamic traditions, “rejecting, and where possible, eliminating cultural elements of diversity within the Islamic world” and (2) the strict adherence to the early customs that recall the time of the Prophet, “opposing outside influences as innovations” of a foreign and unworthy nature.<sup>284</sup> Unlike many of the movements examined in this analysis, Sunni Mahdist movements are unique in that persecution and moral decline, although prerequisites, were not the key stimulus. Fundamentalist Mahdi movements tend to emerge on “the borderlands of Islam” once Islamization of the community had successfully occurred and the community generally accepted the Islamic traditions.

Despite these differences, the Mahdi rebellion in Sudan shared a number of characteristics with the preceding messianic movements, including legalism, resistance to secular authority, inspirationalism, polarity, mysticism, and messianism. Each of these tenets has been discussed in reference to both the Anabaptists in Münster and the Babis in Iran; however, their significance must be touched on in reference to the Mahdi rebellion as well. Legalism, or the strict interpretation and observance of Islamic laws and traditions represented a main motivating force for Mohammad Ahmad bin Abdallah and his followers, who believed that observance of these laws had become lax in the preceding years. An examination of his proclamations and letters reveals the intensity with which the Mahdi sought to purify Sudanese customs to align with Islamic laws and traditions. As Islam spread beyond the “Islamic heartland” into areas such as Africa the decision to include and adapt elements of the local culture in the overall Islamic framework increased its popularity. In Sudan, for example, many Muslims continued to smoke, drink, and wear amulets to protect against evil spirits. The local culture’s superstitions wove their way into the Islamic tradition. These practices deeply disturbed Mohammad Ahmad, who banned them amongst his followers and converts. The Mahdi “vigorously opposed any

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<sup>283</sup> Scharbrodt, Oliver. *Islam and the Baha'i Faith*. London: Routledge, 2008. p. 9-13.

<sup>284</sup> Voll, John. “The Sudanese Mahdi: Frontier Fundamentalist.” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 10.2 (1979): 152. Throughout this article, Voll examines the fundamentalist nature of the Sunni Mahdi, identifying a rich tradition of the already established fundamentalist framework.

toleration of customs that were counter to the basic teachings of Islam.”<sup>285</sup> Resistance to secular authority was inextricably linked to the importance of legalism and acted as a unifying factor amongst disparate tribes throughout Sudan. Although Islamic, the manifestation of religion for Egyptian authorities differed substantially from the mystical adaptation present throughout Sudan. The corruption and overall low moral standards of Egyptian officials served to separate them further from the Sudanese, who came to resent their permissive interpretation of orthodox Islam.

Inspirationalism played a key role throughout the development of the Mahdi’s rebellion. Mohammad Ahmad’s divine inspiration led to his proclamation of Mahdihood, as well as the movement’s progression across the Sudan. These divine revelations inspired and united many of his followers, legitimizing his claims. Esotericism in Sunni Islam is almost exclusively tied to Sufism and links to the mysticism inherent in the practice. Traditional Sufism serves to achieve unity with God through a rejection of earthly possessions and purification of the heart. Fundamentalist Islam finds fault with the Sufi belief in human transcendence and the ability to bridge the gap that naturally exists between human and the divine. For this reason, although Mohammad Ahmad participated in Islamic mysticism, he rejected the notion that individuals can achieve oneness with God, focusing instead on achieving a “mystical union with the spirit of the prophet.”<sup>286</sup>

Polarity, specifically in reference to the movement’s hierarchical structure, proved extremely important in the movement’s continued success. The Mahdi drew members of disparate tribes to act as leaders within the various provinces, serving to further unite them. The Mahdi continued to act as a charismatic authority and the single assimilating force between the tribes. However, unlike many of the movements examined in this analysis, the Mahdi’s empowerment of local tribes decentralized power and increased the movement’s sustainability after the Mahdi’s death. Messianism also played a key role in the movement’s development, serving as a primary motivation for its revolutionary actions. The transition from pacifist to revolutionary movement will be examined in more depth through the subsequent analysis.

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p. 158.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

## History of the Sudan

The colonization attempts of the nineteenth century were not Sudan's first encounter with an imperial force. Islam's impact on Sudan began in the seventh century when the Arab Muslim Empire invaded the northern region. The subsequent peace accords firmly established Islam amongst the tribes across North Sudan. From this point forwards the northern region began the long Islamization process. By the nineteenth century "the universalized Islamic ideal was widely accepted by masses and leaders."<sup>287</sup> This long history of Islamization is crucial to the overall success Mohammad Ahmad's movement attained. As a "substantial proportion of the population adopted Islam at least nominally, the way was open for a leader to appeal to the Islamic ideal and lead a revolutionary reformist movement in opposition to the semi-Islamized social and political establishment."<sup>288</sup> However, Mohammad Ahmad's movement did not emerge in a vacuum. The socio-political climate created an environment ripe for revolution.

The story of the Mahdi's revolution truly begins with Egypt's colonization of the Sudan. The Sudan came under Egyptian rule in the 1820s. There were two phases of Egyptian expansion, first under Muhammad 'Alī Pasha and subsequently under his grandson Khedive Ismā'īl. Muhammad 'Alī Pasha first sent an expedition to Sudan in 1821 under the command of his son Ismā'īl Kāmil Pasha with the intent of not only acquiring slaves and gold, but extricating the Mamlūk element that had fled to the region following the Mamlūk slaughter at the hands of Muhammad 'Alī in Cairo. From the beginning, Egyptian rule was oppressive and violent. A Sudanese revolt in 1822 killed his third son, Ismā'īl, infuriating the khedive, who retaliated by leveling cities and selling entire tribes into slavery. The slave trade flourished under Muhammad 'Alī Pasha's rule, generating extensive wealth for all involved. Slaves were primarily drawn from two regions, "the non-Arab territories bordering on Darfur and the marshes of Abyssinia."<sup>289</sup> Throughout Muhammad 'Alī Pasha's rule, the Egyptians' primary concern was that each province was "self-supporting and [capable of sending] a handsome tribute to

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, p. 162.

<sup>289</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 10. It is estimated that during Muhammad 'Alī Pasha's reign "400,000 slaves were exported" from these regions. Lieutenant-Colonel F. W. Moffitt gives an excellent description of the horrifying nature of the slave trade in Sudan in his article "Some Despatches from Khedive Ismail to Major-General Charles Gordon," *Journal of the African Society* XXXIV.CXXXV (1935): 108.



Cairo.”<sup>290</sup> Revenue in the provinces could “only be obtained by taxing the Natives, but as the slave traders had taken all their possessions and the Natives had ceased to cultivate the ground, taxes could not be collected, and consequently neither the officials nor the troops could be paid.”<sup>291</sup> The simplest solution to this problem was for the Egyptian administration to support and to assist slave traders in their industry. Throughout this period slave trade acted as the primary source of income for the administration of the province. His grandson expanded these aims in an effort to “extend the dominion of Egypt to the south and west but also at the same time to suppress the slave trade in the Sudan.”<sup>292</sup> Egypt became increasingly reliant on European powers, which funded many of Isma’il Pasha’s excursions. As the outcry against “the atrocities of the slave trade became so great that Khedive Isma’il, who wished to stand well with his European creditors, was forced to take action.”<sup>293</sup> This became an increasingly difficult task, as the policies in existence under his grandfather, Muhammad ‘Alī Pasha, had served to reinforce the thriving slave trade industry. Throughout this period, the Egyptians relied on the Sudan to generate revenue to finance their objectives. By 1874 war erupted between Egypt and Abyssinia, bankrupting the Egyptian khedive and increasing the importance of reining in the Sudan.

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<sup>290</sup> Moffitt, Lieutenant-Colonel F.W. “Some Despatches from Khedive Ismail to Major-General Charles Gordon.” *Journal of the African Society* XXXIV.CXXXV (1935): 109.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>292</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 3.

<sup>293</sup> Moffitt, Lieutenant-Colonel F.W. “Some Despatches from Khedive Ismail to Major-General Charles Gordon.” *Journal of the African Society* XXXIV.CXXXV (1935): 110.

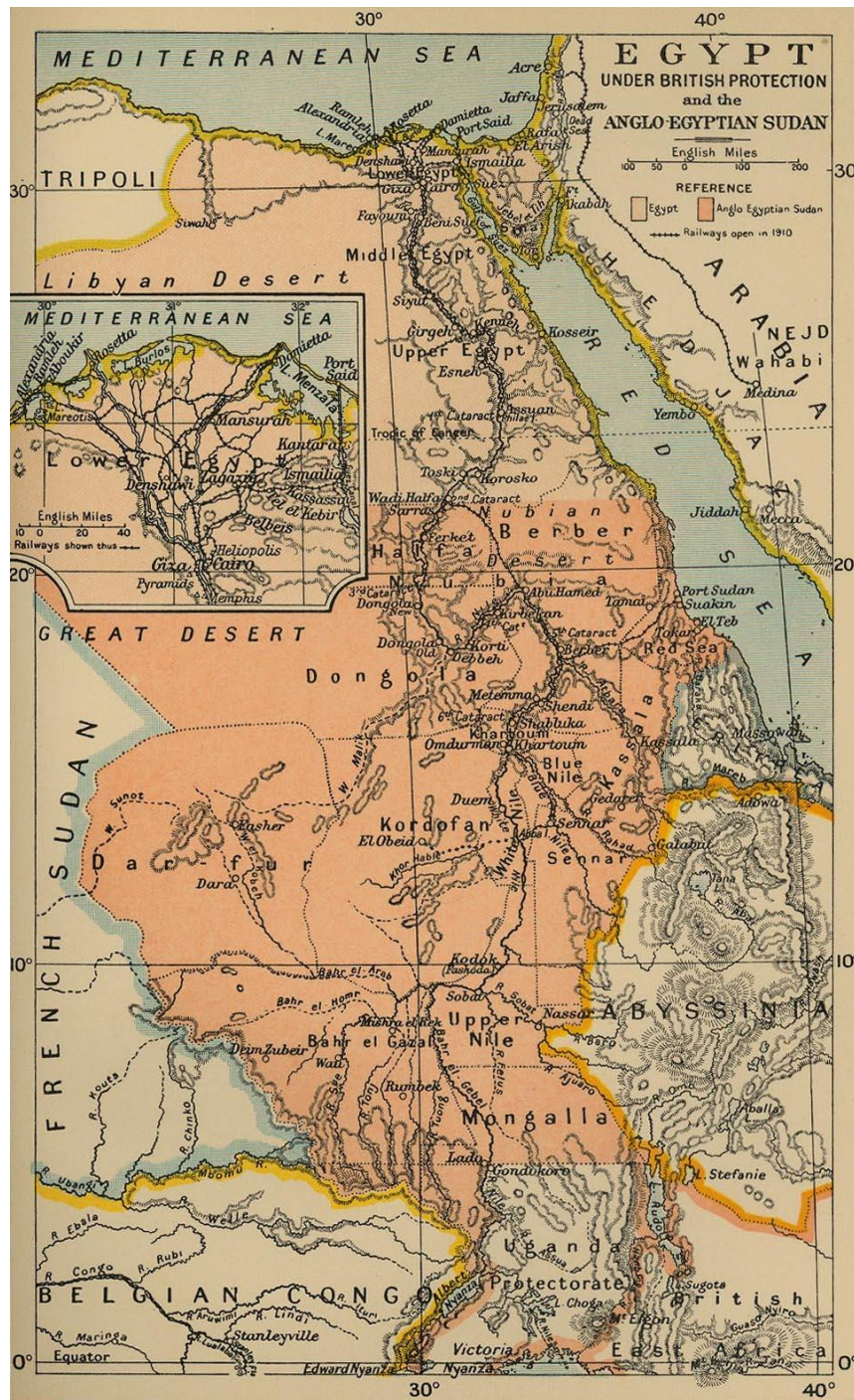


Figure 8. Egypt Sudan under British Control<sup>294</sup>

Jurisdiction over the Sudan brought a unique set of struggles with it, largely because of the segregated tribal structure. The larger towns, such as Khartoum, created a more unified

<sup>294</sup> Ward, Adolphus, G. W. Prothero, Stanley Leathes, and E.A. Benians, eds. *The Cambridge Modern History Atlas*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1912. Reproduced courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

environment; however, feelings of isolation permeated the smaller towns and villages. Many of the tribes resident in northern Sudan relied primarily on agriculture, camels, and cattle to survive. The Mahass, the Danāqla, and the Shāiqīya settled along the river banks of the Nile. The Nubian and the Libyan deserts were inhabited by nomadic tribes. The Abābda controlled the caravan route Kurusku to Abu Hamad; whereas the Kabābīsh controlled the routes from the western Sudan to Asyut. In the plains south of Khartoum the nomadic Baqqāra, or cattle-owning Arabs, made their living. The Nubas lived in isolation in the mountains. The Fur and the Masālāt also lived in the mountains in western Darfur and were among the non-Arab tribes who had successfully maintained their own traditions and speech, upholding a sense of separatism despite their conversion to Islam. The southern part of Sudan was primarily African and non-Muslim composed of warrior tribes, such as the Dinak, the Shilluk, the Nuer, and the Azande. There were several small Arabicized African tribes as well, such as the Njangulgule and Feroqe who maintained a close relationship with the Arab tribes north of the Bahr al-‘Arab. The Egyptians were unable to colonize these southern districts until as late as 1870. The divisive living conditions made it easy for the Egyptians to utilize tribes against one another, ensuring they would not band together. The success of this tactic will be discussed later in this section.

It was up to the Egyptian administration to devise a system that would enable cohesion and control. During the sixty years of Egyptian rule, an extensive bureaucracy was established at the head of which sat the governor-general, who was responsible for all of the Sudan and reported directly to Cairo. The governor-general was stationed in Khartoum, a remote post with little Egyptian oversight. The Egyptians, fearing corruption, attempted to limit the governor-general’s power and influence by constraining the position to five years. For many, their service in Sudan was a form of exile that only the prospect of financial gain lessened, increasing the risk of corruption. Under the governor-general there sat the provincial governors or mudīrs, who acted as the administrators of the provinces or mudīriya. Below the mudīr was the ma’mūr, who served as the assistant governor. Each mudīriya was divided into districts known as qisms, which were divided into subdistricts or khutts. The mudīriya were grouped among larger portions of Sudan.

Western Sudan was comprised of the Darfur, Kordofan, the Bahr al-Ghazāl, and Dongola provinces; Central Sudan was comprised of the Khartoum, Sennar, Berber, Fashoda, and Equatoria provinces; and Eastern Sudan was comprised of the al-Tāka, Suakin, and Massawa

provinces. A fourth region comprised of the khedive's Somali and Abyssinian assets were known collectively as "the governor-generalate of Harar."<sup>295</sup> The relative strengths of this system lay in its army and in its financial advisors. The army was primarily composed of slaves who were conscripted in the jihādīya and formed the major element within the Khedivial army. They were supported by the Shāīqīya tribe which eventually replaced the Albanian and Turkish component that dominated at the time of the initial colonization. The Egyptian government relied on the Khedivial army to provide a level of control in Sudanese affairs that was lacking from the oversight of the governor-general. The financial advisors were generally Copts from Egypt, and became fully integrated into the Sudan almost immediately.<sup>296</sup>

Sudanese discontent continued to grow throughout this period, primarily due to the Egyptian administration's policies. This discontent affected and spread across the entire population, irrespective of position or rank, creating an environment ripe for revolution. Naum Shoucair identifies four principal causes of the revolution, all of which arise from inadequacies associated with the Egyptian government.<sup>297</sup> First was the extreme violence exhibited throughout Muhammad 'Alī Pasha's initial occupation, fostering a desire amongst the people for revenge. The heavy taxes levied against the Sudanese in an attempt to maintain funding for the numerous modernization programs also served to ignite discontent.<sup>298</sup> The authorities' unequal treatment of tribes, particularly the Shāīqīya tribe and the Khatmīya sect, provoked jealousy amongst the other tribes and served to fuel the dissatisfaction many felt under Egyptian rule. However, it was the Egyptian's policy of prohibition against the slave trade that impacted the economic prospects across tribal lines and fueled a common abhorrence for their subjugator.

It appears to be this last cause that truly united the Sudanese against Egyptian rule, precisely because it impacted all classes across the entire region. Ismā'īl began his efforts to

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>296</sup> Copts are the native Christian Egyptians, one of the major ethnoreligious groups in Egypt. Copts have been continuously persecuted; however, under Muhammad 'Alī Pasha's reign their position began to change. Muhammad 'Alī Pasha abolished the jizya [the tax levied on non-Arabs] and opened up rights, including the ability to join the military and serve as financial advisors in Sudan.

<sup>297</sup> Shoucair, Naum. *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān*. Cambridge, 1903. P. iii. 109-12. This account was translated by P.M. Holt and is available in his work on *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 32.

<sup>298</sup> Taxes often ran as high as ninety-five to one hundred percent of the purchase cost; the annual tax on a "male slave was £2.5, on each head of cattle, £1.10; each sheep and goat, 15s." The shocking revelation is that it only cost £3 to purchase a male slave, and £1.10 for a head of cattle. Farmers were forced to pay an additional tax on their crops, while the entire population was subjected to a general tax levied by the army. For more information on this topic refer to Nels Johnson's article "Religious Paradigms of the Sudanese Mahdīyah." *Ethnohistory* 25.2 (1978): 161.

suppress the slave trade in 1865 and continued until he was deposed in 1879. In 1865, Khedive Ismā'īl “established a police patrol on the Upper Nile at Fashoda and levied a heavy poll tax on the employees of the traders” in an effort to suppress the business.<sup>299</sup> This effort successfully restricted the merchants; but, it did not stop their activities. Merchants became creative in selecting their routes and were often able to avoid the police patrols. By 1869, these taxes had successfully limited the trade near Fashoda but, to the south and in Bar al-Ghazāl slave trade continued almost unrestrained. It was at this point that Ismā'īl decided it was necessary to bring Bar al-Ghazāl and Bar al-Jabal more under his control in order to eradicate the slave trade entirely. In 1873 Ismā'īl formally offered the position of governor of Equatoria to Charles George Gordon. The decision to include Europeans in the effort to eliminate slave trade ultimately served to demoralize the Sudanese even further.

Gordon declared the “government monopoly of the ivory trade and prevent[ion] of the importation of munitions and the formation of private armies” as his first official measure.<sup>300</sup> Trade stagnated under the new decree, isolating Equatoria even further. To reinforce his strict policies, Gordon established a series of military posts along the Bahr al-Jabal. Many merchants were forced into premature retirement, amplifying the previously established feelings of antipathy. Gordon’s policies not only served to reduce slave trade, but to finance the khedive’s expanding empire. Egypt continued to war with Abyssinia, threatening to bankrupt the khedival treasury. The government’s monopoly on ivory trade was to contribute £30,000 to the total Sudanese contribution of £150,000. Gordon’s expenses proved to limit Equatoria’s contributions, worsening Egypt’s insolvency. In spite of the limited funds extracted from Sudan, the khedive continued to expend resources on modernization projects. He financed a railway meant to connect Wādī Halfā to Umbacall, a total distance of 165 miles. They had to clear extensive rock piles blocking the progress of the line.<sup>301</sup> Equipment was ordered from abroad, but the government did not have the funds to cover the expense. The khedive instructed the provinces of Dongola and Berber to compensate it for the expenses associated with the Sudan Railway. The continuous taxation had bankrupted the Sudanese and they were unable to pay

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<sup>299</sup> Collins, Robert O. *The Southern Sudan, 1883 to 1898*. New Have: Yale University Press, 1962. p.14. Khedive replaced the earlier title of Viceroy.

<sup>300</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 36.

<sup>301</sup> Sudan Railways Corporation Historical Background. Available: <http://www.sudanrailways.gov.sd/en/history.htm>

their debt to Cairo. By June 1875 the khedive “ordered steps to be taken to recover all sums due to the government, and suspended the payment of officials until this was done.”<sup>302</sup>

Gordon’s success in Equatoria proved his level of dependability. In February 1877 the khedive offered him the position of governor-general of Sudan. As Gordon assumed the new position, his tactics began to change. During this first year in office he successfully established peace with Abyssinia however tense, appeased the mounting hostility in Darfur, and persuaded the khedive to halt development of the Sudan Railway at least for a time. Gordon began to doubt the Egyptian officials under his command. In July 1878, he decided to dismiss many of them and replace them with Europeans and Sudanese. This decision undermined the administration at a critical juncture, and served to ignite additional rebellions throughout the region. The vigilance of the European officials served to subdue the mounting hostilities in the region, but their forces were not superior and the peace was tenuous. The next few years continued in this manner, until the deposition of Khedive Ismā’īl in June 1879. Gordon departed from Khartoum in the subsequent months and resigned from the Egyptian service altogether the following year.

The khedive and Gordon’s successors adopted a more accommodating approach upon their selection. Muhammad Tawfīq, Ismā’īl’s son, was by all accounts a weak leader who successfully retained his position through British support. Muhammad Ra’ūf Pasha, Gordon’s successor, dismissed many of Gordon’s lieutenants, diminishing his control over the tempestuous relationship amongst the tribal leaders and the slave traders. Under his control, slave trade reemerged on a weakened scale and revolts sprang anew. By 1881, the provinces in their entirety were garrisoned by 40,000 troops in an effort to retain control.<sup>303</sup> The novice troops were primarily composed of irregulars, and their posts were unfortified during the initial phase of revolts. The Egyptian administration relied on a network of telegraphs to communicate between Cairo and the more remote posts.<sup>304</sup> Resupply from Egypt was near impossible especially by

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<sup>302</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 37.

<sup>303</sup> Shoucair, Naum. *Ta’rīkh al-Sūdān*. Cambridge, 1903. P. iii. 113. Shoucair and Holt document the numbers as follows: there were 7,470 troops in Khartoum; 5,830 in Kordofan; 4,863 in Darfur; 2,350 in Sennar; 3,000 in Equatoria and Bhar al-Ghazāl; 4,000 in Dongola and Berber; and 5,500 guarding the Abyssinian front. These figures were also provided by Major Reginald Wingate, who led Egyptian Military Intelligence during the Mahdi revolution, in his book *Mahdism* on P. 550. P. M. Holt describes this scene in his book *The Mahdist State in the Sudan* on p. 40.

<sup>304</sup> Holt describes the telegraph system of the Egyptian Sudan in detail from an illustration that appeared in *The Times* on 6 Feb. 1885, p. 6. “The line extending from upper Egypt ran up the left bank of the Nile by way of New Dongola, al-Dabba, and Kurtī to Nūrī. It went across the Bayūda desert and crossed the Nile to Berber on the right bank. From Kannūr, south of Berber, a branch went to Kassala. The main line continued to Shandī, al-Halfāya, and

land. Most reinforcements and supplies were brought from Suez to Suakin, and marched across the desert to Berber and then by river to Khartoum.<sup>305</sup> The eruption of the ‘Urābist revolution in Egypt coupled with the extensive time and resources required to send provisions reduced the availability of supplies and reinforcements sent to quell the early Sudanese uprisings.<sup>306</sup> Such was the position leading up to Mohammad Ahamd’s appearance as the Mahdi.

### **Establishing a Revolutionary Ideology**

Mohammad Ahmad was a native Sudanese, born in August 1844 on the island of Labab in Dunqulā. His father, ‘Abd Allāh, made his living building boats twelve miles north of Khartoum. His family claimed to be Ashrāf, descendants of the Prophet by way of Fatimah, giving credence to Mohammad Ahmad’s later claims. At an early age Mohammad Ahmad became interested in the pursuit of religious studies and became a pupil of Shaykh al-Amīn al-Suwaylih, a well-known Islamic Sufi shaykh in the Gezira, and “subsequently of Shaykh Muhammad al-Dikayr ‘Abdallāh Khūjalī near Berber.”<sup>307</sup> In 1861, Mohammad Ahmad joined the Sammānīya tarīqa established by Shaykh Muhammad Sharīf Nūr al-Dā’im, and after seven years of learning became a shaykh himself. Not much is known of his early life, although it is generally acknowledged that he was pious and able to recite the Koran from memory.<sup>308</sup> In 1878 Mohammad Ahmad disaffiliated himself from his master, Shaykh Muhammad Sharīf, over a dispute concerning the lax interpretations of Islamic law. The shaykh sanctioned the previously prohibited singing and dancing during the circumcision feasts for his sons. This blatant circumvention of tradition infuriated Mohammad Ahmad, who interpreted his behavior as a sign of moral decline. Shaykh Muhammad Sharīf banished Mohammad Ahmad for his insurrection. Initially Mohammad Ahmad begged for forgiveness; however, once Shaykh Muhammad Sharīf

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Khartoum, which was connected with Omdurman. Branches went to al-Qadārif and Sennar in the east and to El Obeid and Darfur in the west. To judge from lists relating to the Mahdist period, the operators were chiefly muwallads.” Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 41.

<sup>305</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 41-42.

<sup>306</sup> The ‘Urābist revolution (1878-1882) occurred in opposition to “the subjection of Egypt to external pressures on the one hand and aimed at the democratization of internal politics on the other hand. Though it was eventually suppressed by British military intervention and the country was occupied by the British, it was undoubtedly the first full scale anti-imperialist struggle in Egypt.” Yoshiko Kurita “The Development of Secularism and non-Sectarianism in the Middle East.” *Popular Movements and Democratization in the Islamic World*. New York: Routledge, 2006. p.145.

<sup>307</sup> Shaykh Muhammad al-Dikayr ‘Abdallāh Khūjalī’s name was later changed by the Mahdi to Muhammad al-Khayr. This information is quoted from P. M. Holt’s *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 45.

<sup>308</sup> Robert O. Collins in his study of *The Southern Sudan, 1883 to 1898* discusses his piety; Richard Hill in his book *Egypt in the Sudan 1820-1881* discusses Mohammed Ahmed’s ability to recite the Koran from memory.



offered him reconciliation, Mohammad Ahmad recanted and formally split from his master, committing himself to a new master, Shaykh al-Qurashī of the Sammānīya order.

Mohammad Ahmad began his religious mission on Abā Island, fifteen miles south of Khartoum. In 1879, he journeyed throughout “Kurdufān preaching his ever-constant theme of the renunciation of the vanities of this world as the only approach to God.”<sup>309</sup> This journey had a great impact on Mohammad Ahmad’s future claims. At this time the political situation in Kurdufān was in great conflict. Two rival factions vied for control; one under Ahmad Bey Dafa’allāh supported the Egyptian administration, while the other under Ilyās Pasha was losing power and began supporting any plot that promised to reaffirm its dwindling influence. Mohammad Ahmad met with all of the leading men in the region, giving credence to their claims and expanding his popularity.

As the millennium approached, expectation of the Mahdi’s arrival began to intensify. The anticipation was widespread amongst the poor; however, the “discontent, frustration, and religious revulsion from the low morality of the Egyptian administrators” created a climate in which the desire for religious renewal spread amongst the wealthy as well.<sup>310</sup> As anticipation grew, a rumor circulated that the Mahdi would come from amongst the Sammānīya order, of which Mohammad Ahmad was now the head. The Mahdship was first shown to Mohammad Ahmad through a series of visions and divine voices. He communicated this divine message first to his senior khalīfa, ‘Abdallāhi, and then to his other disciples as well.<sup>311</sup> At this time he began corresponding with other Companions in the districts, “urging them to support the religion, make the hijra and join him.”<sup>312</sup> The public manifestation of Mohammad Ahmad’s divine status took place on Ramadān 1298 [28 July-26 August 1881]. His closest disciples believed that the Mahdi’s manifestation on the island of Abā was one of the truest signs of his status, as it “complies with a Tradition that [the Mahdi] would appear suddenly from an unknown direction and manner.”<sup>313</sup> With his disciples’ acceptance, Mohammad Ahmad began his formal declaration of Mahdihood.

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid, p. 18 and P. M. Holt’s *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 50.

<sup>310</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 50.

<sup>311</sup> Khalīfa refers to the deputy of a Sufi shaykh. These visions and divine voices were documented by Muhammad Ahmed’s disciple, Ismā’il b. ‘Abd al-Qādir whose book, *The Book of the Bliss of Him Who Seeks Guidance by the Life of the Imam the Mahdi*, has been translated by Haim Shaked in *The Life of the Sudanese Mahdi*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1978. p. 64.

<sup>312</sup> Shaked, Haim. *The Life of the Sudanese Mahdi*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1978. p. 64.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, p. 65.



The Mahdi's propaganda served as a catalyst for his cause. In the beginning the Mahdi's letters presented an immature vision, complete with specific references to Sufi saints, all of whom were "nineteenth-century Sudanese associated with the Sammānīya order in the Gezira."<sup>314</sup> By legitimizing his claims through the Sufi saints, Mohammad Ahmad tied himself to the larger Sufi tradition that most Sudanese Muslims adhered to. In order to foster a wider appeal, the Mahdi began adapting his propaganda techniques. He opened each letter with the revelation of his true position through a vision of the Prophet Muhammad seating him at his own chair, and thus declaring Mohammad Ahmad as his successor. Mohammad Ahmad was to be escorted by the angel of death, "who was to precede his army into battle, and by al-Khidr, a prophet to whom the Sufis attribute immortality, omniscience, and omnipresence."<sup>315</sup> As the number of victories grew, these letters came to emphasize his successes as proof of his divine mission. The Mahdi adapted to the occasion and the recipient, purposely using imagery throughout each letter that spoke to the individual. These letters mobilized the masses and served to legitimize the Mahdi's claims in the eyes of the population. As the Mahdi's power grew, the 'ulama became concerned with countering the Mahdi's propaganda campaign. They endeavored to delegitimize his campaign by pointing to the authority and legality of the existing Sudanese administration. They also sought to identify the Traditions associated with the coming Mahdi as criteria to rate his claims. They cited his birth in Dongola, manifestation in Abā, lack of physical characteristics, along with Mohammad Ahmad's ancestry to show that his manifestation did not align with what was foretold. These letters "make it clear that to describe the Mahdi's campaign as simply one against taxes, deprivation and political oppression would be to misunderstand his personal sense of mission. Not only did he believe in those visitations and instructions from the Prophet Muhammad, he also protested that the country's leaders were no longer real Muslims and therefore no longer had any right to rule."<sup>316</sup> Even after the "formal assumption of Mahdship (June 1881) it took the authorities about six weeks to react coercively."<sup>317</sup> This delay afforded the Mahdi with a calm period to rally his supporters, providing a distinct advantage.

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<sup>314</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 105.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>316</sup> Nicoll, Fergus. *The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon*. Charleston: The History Press, 2005. p. xix.

<sup>317</sup> Dekmejian, Richard H., and Margaret J. Wyszomirski. "Charismatic Leadership in Islam: The Mahdi of the Sudan." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14.2 (1972): 204

In his effort to purify Islam, returning it to its glory at the time of the Prophet, the Mahdi required his believers to speak the oath of allegiance which spelled out their specific assignment of deterring “threat, adultery, and false accusations;” three of the most common sins “that corrupted society and caused dissension amongst the faithful.”<sup>318</sup> The Mahdi also included the duty of jihād in this oath, which became an incontestable part of the movement. By bringing followers into his inner circle, the Mahdi delegated many of the movement’s responsibilities to his deputies. This remains one of the central tenets of his success. However, his authority as established through his numerous victories and visions secured his position within the movement. The Mahdi acted as the unifying force between the disparate tribes who for so long strived to remain distinct.

The Mahdi sought to establish his own customs, abolishing those Sudanese customs that were in direct opposition to the sharī’a. Many of his initial proclamations dealt specifically with women and their conduct. They were to be veiled at all times. If a woman was unveiled she was to be beaten. Women were not allowed to go onto public streets or to the market place. These policies were directed in an effort to restrict women’s contact with strange men and thus retain their purity. If a man even greeted a strange woman, he was to fast for two months and receive one hundred lashes. As he sought to abolish the Egyptians and their policies, the Mahdi identified severe recourse for those customs he thought to be foreign in order to maintain discipline within the tribal ranks. The Mahdi deemed dancing, music, smoking, and drinking to be grave offences, requiring a more austere existence. He also dissolved all Sufi orders in an effort to establish himself as the sole authority ensuring his follower’s loyalty would not be undermined by their shaykhs. By establishing his supreme authority amongst his followers, the Mahdi confirmed his position as the rightful successor.

### **Mahdi Rising**

Following the formal declaration of the Mahdia, Muhammad Ahmad began composing a series of letters to prominent individuals across Sudan. These letters urged his followers to make the hijra, “the flight for the Faith from among the infidels to the Mahdi,”<sup>319</sup> in an effort to “save Islam and to abandon the innovations and the reprehensible characteristics of the people of the

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<sup>318</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 117.

<sup>319</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 54.

time, particularly those who belonged to the Sufi tariqas.”<sup>320</sup> Scholars disagree whether these early letters called the followers to the jihād as well; however, he did establish his aim of “reviv[ing] the religion, rectify[ing] the Custom of the Prophet, support[ing] the Truth, resist[ing] the innovators and mak[ing] them repent.”<sup>321</sup> Upon receiving the Mahdi’s letters, many tribes flocked to join him.<sup>322</sup>

As awareness of the Mahdi’s appearance spread, the governor-general Muhammad Ra’ūf became increasingly uneasy. He had been warned prior to Muhammad Ahmad’s formal declaration by the Mahdi’s former master, Shaykh Muhammad Sharīf, but had disregarded the warning as an internal struggle between feuding religious leaders. Muhammad Ra’ūf obtained a copy of the Mahdi’s letters and inquired about the claims therein only to discover that Muhammad Ahmad unabashedly proclaimed his divine status. Enraged, Muhammad Ra’ūf summoned a council of the ‘ulama, who “agreed that the arrest of Muhammad Ahmad was necessary to prevent the spread of false doctrine, and he dispatched his assistant, Muhammad Bey Abū al-Su’ūd, to summon the Mahdi to Khartoum.”<sup>323</sup> Abū al-Su’ūd reached the Mahdi on 7 August 1881; however, the Mahdi refused to return with him and Abū al-Su’ūd was forced to return empty handed. The Mahdi’s blatant spurn inspired Muhammad Ra’ūf to act swiftly and decisively. On 12 August, he dispatched Abū al-Su’ūd once more alongside two companies of troops to escort the Mahdi by force to Khartoum. From the time it took Abū al-Su’ūd and his troops to travel to Abā Island, the Mahdi had successfully amassed a group of 350 men armed only with swords and spears. When the two companies arrived, they operated entirely independent of one another, allowing the Mahdists to gain the upper hand.<sup>324</sup> The Mahdists ambushed the companies during the night, defeating them. The surviving officers fled back to the ship where Abū al-Su’ūd made the decision to, once again, return to Khartoum empty

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<sup>320</sup> Muhammad Ahmed’s disciple, Ismā’īl b. ‘Abd al-Qādir whose book, *The Book of the Bliss of Him Who Seeks Guidance by the Life of the Imam the Mahdi*, has been translated by Haim Shaked in *The Life of the Sudanese Mahdi*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1978. p. 66.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid, p. 67. The debate surrounding the call to jihād occurred between Holt, Collins, and Ismā’īl b. ‘Abd al-Qādir. Holt and Collins both ascribe to the notion that these early letters did not include the call to jihād, whereas the Mahdi’s disciple documents that he urged them to jihād in his early letters.

<sup>322</sup> Ismā’īl b. ‘Abd al-Qādir notes that the following tribes flocked to the Mahdi right away: Dighaym, Kināna, Husunāt, Amārna, Duwayh, and Fallāta.

<sup>323</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 55.

<sup>324</sup> Prior to their departure, Muhammad Ra’ūf had promised the company commander’s that whomever captured Mohammad Ahmed would receive a promotion to the rank of major. This was meant as an incentive, but had the negative effect of pitting the two companies against one another, with a complete lack of cooperation. When the companies arrived on Abā Island they went their separate ways. Without the other companies’ support, each fell independently.

handed. The Mahdi's initial victory seemed miraculous, and in turn the Mahdi's disciples recorded the miracles that occurred as proof of his divine status. These miracles included the muddy battleground that caught and delayed the "enemies of God;" the Mahdists' inferior weapons; the Mahdi's evasion of death as he dismounted his horse at the moment it was shot; the Mahdist victory despite their unpreparedness and lack of equipment; and the Khalifa's wisdom in concealing the Mahdi's wound in order to prevent panic amongst the Companions.<sup>325</sup>

Anticipating the subsequent mission that was sure to be delivered by Muhammad Ra'ūf upon learning of his soldiers' defeat, the Mahdists embarked on the hijra to Kordofan. Muhammad Ra'ūf called upon Muhammad Sa'id, the governor of Kordofan, to march towards Abā and defeat the Mahdi. Upon his arrival, Muhammad Sa'id learned of the Mahdi's desertion. He and his soldiers "devastated the island, looted the Companions' properties, and then followed in the Mahdi's tracks."<sup>326</sup> Heavy rainfall prevented any major encounter between Muhammad Sa'id and the Mahdists; however, in line with the Mahdi's continuous propaganda his disciples proclaimed that Muhammad Sa'id had fled upon learning of the Mahdi's impending movement against him.<sup>327</sup> Following their near encounter with Muhammad Sa'id, the Mahdists continued their journey towards the Nūba Mountains, on the border of the Kordofan and Fashoda provinces. The Mahdists arrived in Jabal Qadīr on 31 October 1881 where they received a warm welcome from the chief. Word of the Mahdi's arrival spread and was brought to the attention of the governor of Fashoda, Rāshid Bey Aymān. The messenger spoke of the great suffering the Mahdists felt due to their sickness and wounds, leading Rāshid to believe it would be an opportune time to attack. Rāshid requested Muhammad Ra'ūf's permission and was denied, but determined to attack regardless. Rāshid gathered a force of 1400 men, hoping to ambush the Mahdists. A woman from the Kināna tribe warned the Mahdi of the impending attack. The Mahdi deployed his army, approximately 8,000 men strong, overwhelming Rāshid's forces on 9 December 1881. Rāshid was killed alongside 111 of his followers, and the Mahdists collected a large number of arms and valuables.

Muhammad Ra'ūf informed the khedive of Rāshid's defeat, only to be ordered to dispatch his troops to fight the Mahdi. Muhammad Ra'ūf called upon Muhammad Sa'id, who

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<sup>325</sup> These miracles are documented in Ismā'il b. 'Abd al-Qādir's book, *The Book of the Bliss of Him Who Seeks Guidance by the Life of the Imam the Mahdi*, has been translated by Haim Shaked in *The Life of the Sudanese Mahdi*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1978. p. 79-80.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

sent a considerable force under Mahmūd Efendi ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. An expeditionary force was organized in Fashoda under the command of Yūsuf Hasan al-Shallālī. Al-Shallālī underestimated the Mahdists, believing that they could be swiftly defeated. Al-Shallālī’s forces encamped near Qadīr, failing to fortify their campsite to fend off surprise attacks. The Mahdists attacked the morning of 30 May, defeating Al-Shallālī’s army. The Mahdists collected the weapons and valuables to be split amongst them. As a direct result of this third miraculous victory, many clamored to join the Mahdi’s cause. These initial successes “probably said as much about viceregal weakness as about the strength of the dervishes,” leading the Mahdi to determine that the time had come to attack El Obeid, the provincial capital.<sup>328</sup>

The principal tribes of the Kordofan and Gezira provinces had already begun revolting against the Egyptian administration. Decentralization of forces was one unique feature of the Mahdi’s revolution. The Mahdi rarely needed to be present at the uprisings around the Sudan. He pulled many local leaders into his army and entrusted them with the authority to defeat the government forces whenever possible. In some cases the Mahdi did send representatives such as the emissary ‘Abdallāh w. al-Nūr, who “coordinated the [Kordofan] tribal risings into a mass movement against the administrative posts.”<sup>329</sup> The uprisings had begun in isolation between the nomadic tribes and the Egyptian army; however, with ‘Abdallāh w. al-Nūr’s arrival the tribes began to work in concert. On 20 April 1882, the Hamar and Bidayrīya tribes successfully attacked the town of Abū Harāz, slaughtering many of the inhabitants and collecting their possessions. This was the first among many orchestrated attacks throughout the next few months across disparate points. As news of the Mahdi’s victories spread to the tribes between the Nile rivers new believers began pledging their loyalty and launching localized revolts. Although these revolts were not alarming on their own, the Mahdists coordinated them with a larger attack on Sennar, “the principal garrison and administrative center on the Blue Nile.”<sup>330</sup> Sennar was vulnerable to attack as many of the soldiers had travelled to support al-Shallālī, leaving only seventy-five regular soldiers and thirty-three irregulars. The revolutionaries were led by a local leader, ‘Āmir al-Makāshfī, who had been imprisoned and fined by Sennar’s governor after his brother had joined the Mahdi. ‘Āmir found a ready supply of disgruntled tribesmen to join his

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<sup>328</sup> Cole, Juan. *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt’s Urabi Movement*. Ewing: Princeton University Press, 1992. p. 218.

<sup>329</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 59.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

cause and with 3,000 followers he stormed Sennar successfully, capturing a portion of the town. Government forces overthrew the rebels after the arrival of reinforcements on 13 April. The government's victory had secured the Blue Nile, at least for a time. With the defeat at Sennar, the Mahdi focused his attentions on El Obeid.

By September the Mahdi joined 'Abdallāh w. al-Nūr en route to El Obeid. The continued attacks had decreased the population's morale significantly, leaving them vulnerable to the Mahdi's requests for surrender. A number of refugees fled from El Obeid to the Mahdi's camps, just before the Mahdist attack on 8 September. The initial surge was unsuccessful, leading the Mahdi to employ the confiscated firearms for the first time. The converted professional soldiers of the jihādīya were the only ones to use them. 'Abd al-Qādir Pasha Hilmī, the governor-general, realizing the gravity of the situation in El Obied, sent reinforcements from Khartoum. In preparation for just such an occasion, the Mahdi ordered all wells on the routes leading to El Obied to be filled in. The advancing troops' resources were severely depleted by the time they neared Bāra, at which time the Mahdists intercepted and devastated their ranks. The survivors advanced to Bāra in October 1882. Provisions in Bāra were scarce due to a recent fire ignited by a Mahdist sympathizer. A council of officers made the decision to surrender, but resolved to hold out until early January to see if the promised reinforcements would arrive. On 6 January 1883 the garrison agreed to join the Mahdi in his quest, swearing allegiance to the cause. The fall of Bāra disheartened the garrison in El Obeid, whose supplies had dwindled resulting in pervasive starvation. On 15 January 1883, the Mahdi sent another offer to surrender. Initially, the messenger was imprisoned; however, as the soldiers discussed the offer, they decided to accept. By 19 January a ceasefire was called and the Mahdi entered the town. The Mahdists looted the town, collecting funds for the Mahdi's newly established Treasury, the Bayt al-Māl.<sup>331</sup> It was at this time that the Mahdi "issued a long proclamation asserting in the most emphatic terms the supremacy of 'Abdallāhi and conferring plenary powers upon him."<sup>332</sup> Many of the Mahdists had become jealous of the Mahdi's favoritism of 'Abdallāhi; however, this proclamation served to secure his deputy's rightful place as his successor.

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<sup>331</sup> Up until the fall of El Obeid, many of the tribesmen continued to loot all they could in hopes of securing their wealth and continued success. However, with the fall of El Obeid the Mahdi gained territorial sovereignty over much of western Sudan. From this point forward there was a noticeable financial system in place. All looting resulted in the Mahdi claiming one-fifth as described in the Koran and the rest of the warriors dividing the spoils evenly.

<sup>332</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 122.

The khedive refused to submit despite the Mahdi's considerable victories. Following the 'Urābist revolution his army had been reduced to a mere 6,000 men, not nearly enough to regain the heavy losses in the Sudan. Due to economic and strategic interests in the region, the British assisted the khedive in retaining power in Egypt; however they were not so inclined in the Sudan. The khedive was resolute in his desire to retain the Sudanese provinces in an effort to legitimize his power. He began recruiting, ultimately resulting in the appointment of 'Alā' al-Dīn Pasha Siddīq as governor-general, Sulaymān Pasha Niyāzī as commander-in-chief, and Colonel William Hicks as his chief-of-staff.<sup>333</sup> Colonel Hicks was a retired officer in the Indian Army, and although he was a British citizen his new position was directly under the Egyptian government with no ties to the British government. By the late spring of 1883, Hicks met with a few initial successes against the Mahdist forces. Hicks purposely focused his efforts on a smaller area near the Nile Basin, close to Khartoum. He was able to successfully drive back the advancing rebels partly due to the weak hold Mahdist forces had on the area. Throughout this period, tension mounted in the relationship between Hicks and Sulaymān Pasha Niyāzī. Sulaymān Pasha was removed from power in July 1883 and Hicks was given full authority as the new commander-in-chief.

The khedive realized that something must be done about the Mahdi's growing influence in the Kordofan province. The khedive ordered Hicks by telegraph to take the offensive and suppress the uprisings in the Kordofan province. Hicks evaluated the available forces, taking into account the relative dangers associated with advancing into the Mahdi's stronghold. In June he "informed Cairo that at least 10,000 men would be required for the operation, the cost of which he estimated at £120,000."<sup>334</sup> The Egyptian government identified as many reinforcements as possible to send to Hicks' aid. When Hicks departed on 8 September towards the base at Dueim it was in the company of "7,000 infantry, 500 cavalry, and 400 mounted irregulars."<sup>335</sup> From the beginning the two chief officers could not agree on the best approach. There was much debate on the route to take on their advance to the Mahdi's base in El Obeid. Hicks believed the northern route to be safest, advancing through Bāra a distance of some one hundred thirty five miles. 'Alā' al-Dīn worried that there would not be enough water available along this route, arguing that even though the south-eastern route was longer ample supplies

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

would be available. This route was two hundred fifty miles and ran through relatively concealed terrain ending in El Obeid. On 27 September, the forces left Dueim, advancing towards El Obeid.

As news spread of the Egyptian forces progress, the Mahdi disseminated proclamations to the tribes alerting them of the impending battle. The Mahdi left El Obeid, stationing himself on the outskirts of town. From this point forward, the Mahdist forces began training with the looted weapons, accustoming their horses to the sound of gunfire. The Mahdi sent a reconnaissance force to observe Hicks' progress, cutting off communications whenever possible and harassing the officers without entering into any formal engagements. On 11 October the Mahdist rebels located the Egyptian forces and began filling in the wells, killing straggling soldiers, and starving the camels to the best of their abilities. On 24 October, Hicks' troops arrived in al-Rahad, expecting to join forces with the enlisted soldiers; however, no soldiers arrived. The troops waited six days for any sign of the reinforcements but none came. On 30 October Hicks' forces began their final advance towards El Obeid with the Mahdi receiving daily updates on the status of their progress. By 1 November, they had reached El Obeid and a garrison was left behind to guard the town. The Mahdists made contact with the Egyptian forces on 3 November, attacking them as they advanced through a thickly wooded area. The Mahdists did not slacken their pace, launching a subsequent attack on 5 November and massacring the Egyptian forces, killing both Hicks and 'Alā' al-Dīn. Only two hundred fifty soldiers survived the encounter. One week later, the Mahdi entered El Obeid once more, preceded by his faithful army.

The Mahdi's victory over Hicks' forces influenced the movement's perceived significance. The British government began to rethink their position of non-intervention, and the Mahdi began to prepare for his next onslaught. One of the more serious consequences of the Mahdi's conquest was the immediate collapse of the Egyptian administration's hold on Darfur and Bahr al-Ghazāl. For the Egyptian forces at Darfur, Hicks represented their last hope. Darfur had long been a point of contention, favoring the local tribes and refusing to pay taxes; however, the governor desperately hoped for the Mahdi's defeat. In November 1883, as news of Hicks' defeat spread to Darfur, the governor realized that there was no hope and subsequently surrendered. Bahr al-Ghazāl presented a similar tale. Many of the soldiers fighting within the



Egyptian forces had no reason to remain loyal to their Egyptian and European leaders and began converting en masse to the Mahdi's rule.

With the defeat of El Obeid, the Mahdi turned his attention to larger conquests, mainly Khartoum. Khartoum presented an inherently more difficult target due primarily to its continuous communication with Egypt by way of the Nile valley and the Suakin-Red Sea. These communication routes converged in Berber, the tribes of which had not been negatively impacted under Egyptian rule and thus had remained loyal to the regime. In order to achieve success, the Mahdi utilized the discontent that had been brewing among the formerly wealthy slave traders. These men provided the Mahdi with a substantive base comprised of local tribes. The Egyptian army suffered great losses following the Mahdi's success in El Obeid. By November 1883, the British suggested that the Sudan excursion be abandoned. Without hope of triumph on their own, the Egyptians had no choice but to concur. The British citizens cried for General Charles Gordon, whom they believed to be the only soldier capable of defeating the Mahdi due to his extensive successes in China.<sup>336</sup> Regardless of these great military successes, Gordon had no ear for Arabic and as he took control in the Sudan, he had no understanding of what was truly happening. On 22 January 1884, Gordon was appointed the governor-general charged with evacuating the Sudan.

Upon his arrival in Khartoum, Gordon realized that his task was more difficult than he first thought. He initially intended a peaceful handover, returning the Sudanese provinces to their former sovereignty. After realizing that peaceful transition with the Mahdi's assistance would be futile, he sought to establish "a strong successor government in order to allow evacuation to proceed and to protect those who would not be evacuated."<sup>337</sup> The Mahdi's reliance on local prominent citizens had made him an even more influential leader than the European forces could have realized. In the time since the fall of El Obeid, the Mahdi had placed Mohammad Abu Girga as his deputy in Khartoum. As the siege of Khartoum began, the

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<sup>336</sup> Nicoll, Fergus. *The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon*. Charleston: The History Press, 2005. p. 218. Nicoll discusses the decision to place Gordon in charge once again in great detail. In fact, the Egyptians were not supportive of the decision, believing Zubeir Rahmatallah Mansur a more appropriate choice. Zubeir was Muslim and "a member of the influential and widespread Ja'aliyin tribe, a man who still commanded a considerable following in the south and center of Sudan." Zubeir's supporters underestimated the anti-slavery lobby in Britain. In fact, as soon as Zubeir's name was mentioned as a possible replacement the "Anti-Slavery Society mounted a demonstration on 4 December 1883, to denounce his possible employment in Khartoum." The Gladstone government was "simply too weak to force the issue in the House of Commons." p. 218.

<sup>337</sup> Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. p. 96.

Mahdi divided his army into three branches, each falling under one of the colors of the Prophet: green, red, and black. Khalifa ‘Abdallāhi led the branch of the black flag with the western tribes under his command. Khalifa Alī led the branch of the green flag with the southern tribes under his command. Khalifa Mohammed Sharīf led the branch of the red flag with the northern tribes under his command. As the Mahdi prepared to depart the Kordofan province on his way to Khartoum, Gordon sent a letter offering him the position of governor of the Kordofan province. The Mahdi refused.

Gordon, misunderstanding the Mahdi’s religious appeal, sought to alleviate the hardships of the locals to show his support and win their affection. He revoked the ban on slavery, lowered the tax rate, freed the prisoners, and paid off the government debts. The Mahdi continued his propaganda campaign as well. He sent a letter to Gordon, explaining his religious beliefs and asking Gordon to join him. Gordon refused, and in March 1884 he informed the Mahdi that correspondence between them was no longer necessary. Gordon requested a ten-month respite from battle. The Mahdi had no intention of slowing momentum, especially with the level of success he achieved. Therefore he issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of Khartoum offering them refuge for abandoning the city. The Mahdi’s forces were not strong enough to mount a direct assault. On 13 March, the Mahdists seized al-Halfāya north of Khartoum. Gordon tried desperately to regain the town, sending a force of four thousand troops, which the Mahdists defeated. The Mahdist forces continued to cut off Khartoum from the rest of the country, and by May Gordon was unable even to evacuate the town, surrounded on all sides by Mahdist forces.

The Mahdist forces established themselves on the Blue Nile, southeast of Khartoum. In the beginning, Gordon successfully held them at bay, restraining their advance until mid-July. Gordon pushed forward, retaking al-Halfāya and accessing supplies. Gordon’s attacks were successful when confined to the Nile, where the government forces had the advantage. By September as his forces began to move inland, he was not so lucky. The Mahdist forces massacred them. Gordon’s plans to recapture Berber were cancelled as he saw his forces defeated. Once again Khartoum was completely isolated from the surrounding region. At last the British government agreed to send a relief expedition carrying £300,000. News reached Gordon on 20 September; however, the British expedition did not advance towards Khartoum until 8 January 1885. In the meantime Gordon’s situation continued to worsen. The Mahdist forces had cut off their supplies and those who had remained within the city walls suffered

greatly. The Mahdist army arrived in Khartoum in early September. On 23 October the Mahdi arrived. The Mahdi did not attempt to take the offensive; he fortified his position and set out to starve those within the walls into submission. As the relieving forces approached, the Mahdi delivered an assault before they arrived. A deserter from Gordon's army spoke of a point "where the floodwater had retreated, leaving a strip of muddy ground, unprotected by ditch or rampart."<sup>338</sup> As midnight approached on 25 January the Mahdi ordered an attack. Within hours of the attack there was no resistance at all. Gordon died in the struggle. The relief expedition arrived two days too late. With Gordon dead, the British had no need to continue the operation. On 30 January, four days after the fall, the Mahdi entered the town.

The Mahdi did not remain within Khartoum for long, ordering a new capital to be built to the north of Fort Omdurman. The Mahdist army was transferred there and homes were built for the officers. For a few months the Mahdi acted as the sovereign leader of Sudan. Before he was able to achieve any significant advances in the newly unified Sudan, the Mahdi passed away on 22 June 1885. At the time many believed him to have been poisoned by one of his concubines; however, scholars attribute it to typhus. 'Abdallāhi succeeded him as ruler of a unified Sudan. Even though the Mahdi had issued a proclamation stating 'Abdallāhi's rightful claim, his other deputies vied for the position as well. In order to validate his appointment, 'Abdallāhi issued a document, known as the Proclamation of the Hair, which contained a "series of visions and mystical experiences in Khalifa," declaring to have conversed with the Prophet Muhammad through the Mahdi and al-Khidr.<sup>339</sup> 'Abdallāhi sought to legitimize his authority as the Mahdi's successor, not as the Mahdi himself, working within the construct Mohammad Ahmad established. His followers continued to believe that Muhammad Ahmad was the rightful Mahdi, and that 'Abdallāhi was merely ruling in his stead.

The Mahdi passed away at a decisive moment in the development of his movement. Even though the Sudanese jihād was almost complete, the realization of the Mahdi's Islamic nation had just begun. In his absence, 'Abdallāhi struggled with the composition of an administration capable of fusing the disparate tribes together on a common Islamic foundation. Up until this point the tribes had gained great wealth at the hands of the Mahdi combined with unrestrained military success. The Sudanese celebrated the apocalyptic visions, which bound

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

them to the Mahdi ideals. Faced with almost certain desertion from his northern counterparts, ‘Abdallāhi struggled to restore the administration. In order to do this, many of the methods employed by the Egyptian’s were reimplemented as well, which brought the lure of corruption and oppression that the Mahdi had sought to destroy. Threat of invasion from the British in Egypt loomed over the administration, and in 1899 ‘Abdallāhi died at the hands of the British in an engagement at Umm Diwaykarāt. His death marked the end of the Mahdist movement.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Muhammad Ahmad is generally recognized as the father of Sudanese nationalism. His movement, for perhaps the first time, overcame the tribal and religious loyalties rampant throughout the region and allowed the native Sudanese to act as a single body with common motivations and loyalties. The Mahdi cemented this loyalty by associating his rule to that of the Prophet Muhammad’s. The visions, the hajj, the jihād all acted as sacred symbols of the events foretold by the traditions of the Prophet. Moreover, the Mahdi sought to restore Islam to its rightful austerity as asserted at the time of the Prophet. In many ways, this movement has become the quintessential Mahdist movement, due primarily to its more contemporary nature as well as its great success. The movement successfully held Sudan for almost two decades. The Mahdi served as the central unifying force, cementing these disparate groups together under the banner of a common cause.

Unlike the Shi’i Mahdist movement, the Mahdi was not offering a grassroots revival, but a strict reinterpretation of the sharī’a law. This strict interpretation served to strike obedience and loyalty amongst the followers. Muhammad Ahmad’s claims to mahdihood offered the Sudanese people the opportunity to protect themselves from their oppressors. At its core, the movement contained the seeds of revolutionary nationalism. There was no desire to exist within the structure established by the Egyptians and the British. The Mahdi and his followers sought to create a new Islamic administration, the first of its kind. The westernization of the leading Islamic monarchs had become a common criticism, igniting in many ways a religious revival.

There are a number of themes that serve to highlight the unique nature of Sunni messianism. Permissive authority again seemed to play a significant role; however, in this case it resulted not so much due to a general tolerance but the belief that the Mahdi’s incompetence would lead to failure. The Egyptian administration had no qualms about combating the movement; however, as the government continued to misallocate its finances it could not defend

itself from the Mahdi's growing popularity. The second feature common across all of the movements discussed in this work is the role of the charismatic authority. The Mahdi was one of the central tenets of the movement, uniting the incongruent tribes of the Sudan through his principles and decrees. As described in the previous sections, there tends to be some combination of "signs" that alert potential converts to the Second Coming. There had been recent bouts of war; however, unlike the earlier movements examined in this analysis, these wars do not appear to have had any significant impact on the population's disposition. Rather, it appears to have been the approaching millennium that truly alerted the Sudanese tribes to the Mahdi's impending emergence. The Mahdi and his followers relied on a very distinct subset of hadiths to legitimate his claims, and his continued success in battle against a superior enemy validated them. One of the primary factors of this movement was the reversal of status caused by the Egyptian's administration's anti-slave policies and increased taxation. Elitism did play a role as well; however, it manifested itself in opposition to the prototypical European 'other'. Even from the beginning, militant elitism played an important role within the movement's progression. Particular to the Sunni manifestation was the mystical element associated with the movement. The Mahdi and his followers emerged within the Sufi framework that dominated Sudan during this period. As the Mahdists sought to establish an Islamic state, these tenets provided the movement's foundation and allowed them to unite regardless of their precise background.

#### Section IV – Finding Meaning in it All

Now that we have amassed data relevant to our four case studies, we can begin the process of systematization. The available literature pointed us towards recurring trends in revolutionary messianic movements, namely charismatic authority, antinomianism, elitism, reversal of status, recent bouts of plague and/or famine, natural disasters, and persecution. Specific to Islamic movements are the traits of mysticism and colonialism. The most appropriate way to approach systematization appears to be identifying those traits that precede the onslaught of violence, followed by those traits that aid in a movement's success, and finally characteristics that result from these movements. Once those attributes most important to revolutionary messianic movements were identified, this research was expanded to examine common characteristics with democratic revolutionary movements as well in an attempt to outline a potential way ahead for religious based comparative analysis.

One of the most significant features across all four case studies seems to be the existence of a charismatic authority. It is a fact that each of these men served as a motivating and unifying force within the movement. With this fact in mind, however, one can begin to question the importance of this factor in determining if a movement will transition towards revolution and how successful the movement might be. Based on the available literature it appears that movements can, and do, make the jump towards revolutionary actions without a charismatic authority, such as with the Taborites who had no single charismatic figure prior to their transition to violence. However, the presence of a charismatic authority may accelerate this process. There does seem to be some correlation between the charismatic authority's aptitude for ruling and the movement's success at maintaining power once they have transitioned towards revolution. Without the ability to test these hypotheses, we can only resort to what we have discovered firsthand through research, namely that all of our movements do have a charismatic authority. Eric Hoffner in *The True Believer*, concludes that "revolutions are prepared by 'men of words' – the intellectuals who have transferred allegiance – brought to fulfillment by 'fanatics' – and finally tamed by 'practical men of action'."<sup>340</sup> Due to the negative connotations associated with the titles used in Hoffner's text these terms will be used sparingly. 'Fanatic' in particular must be further refined to highlight that these men were 'fanatic' in the sense that they clung to their beliefs and were willing to fight to the death in honor of these beliefs, and were

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<sup>340</sup> Brinton, Crane. *The Anatomy of Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1965. p. 117.

more radical and uncompromising than merely ‘fanatic’. These case studies do contain a few interesting distinctions. In the case of both Florence and Sudan, these three traits were present within the single charismatic figure. However, the case of Münster relates quite well to Hoffner’s assessment, in which the intellectual preparing the way for the revolution was separate from the fanatics or radicals who actually fulfilled the transition. Iran was significantly different from all three, in which the intellectual was also the radical, but only fulfilled this transition after securing the support of a few key followers and fellow radicals. Based on these distinctions, the only safe generalization is to say that charismatic figures do enhance the movement’s durability; however, this figure may transition between individuals as the movement progresses.

The next three traits appear to be primarily characteristics of the religion that allow believers to make the mental leap necessary to attack nonbelievers. The first of them is common among all four case studies - the antinomian nature of the faith. This characteristic is fairly straightforward and releases all followers from the constraints of moral laws and obligations. As faith alone is the requirement for salvation, many antinomian faiths ultimately embrace ethical permissiveness, which can result in an influx of violence against nonbelievers especially when combined with a feeling of elitism. This feeling of elitism also appears among all four case studies. In each case the followers firmly believed that their religion was superior to all others, and with this feeling of elitism came the ability to dehumanize nonbelievers, classifying them as the “other” against whom all forms of brutality were justified. Not every movement examined in this analysis began with a form of militant elitism. Babism, for example, attempted to work within the existing social structure and religious framework. However, following continued persecution these movements, which already employed an elitist construct, began to make the transition towards militant extremism. The final characteristic common to at least the Islamic movements was the element of mysticism. Shi’ism has inherently mystic qualities associated with it that seem to increase the likelihood that followers will believe in a charismatic authority. In terms of Sunni Islam, those individuals that align with Sufism are more likely to believe in the Mahdi’s emergence. Those individuals more apt to align with notions of mysticism seem to have an easier time believing in the Second Coming.

These traits, when combined with disproportionately severe environmental and economic factors, can hasten the transition to revolution and unify believers. These factors are often considered the “signs” that precede the end time narratives. Not every factor is present in all

cases; some combination seems to be the norm. The number of these characteristics present at or around the time a claimant or charismatic authority emerges appears to directly correlate to the movement's progression and number of converts. The first of these traits is persecution, or at least feelings of persecution. This feature was not common to all four case studies, but it did cross religious traditions. In both Münster and Iran, followers were persecuted, a fact which acted as a unifying force among them. This persecution preceded the transition to violence; however, in the case of Münster, Anabaptists had been continuously persecuted for some time prior to their establishing of this specific community. In Iran, the Babis formed their movement within the existing social framework only to transition towards violence after severe rejection and continued persecution. In both cases sanctioned persecution cemented followers together. As mentioned in the first section, mass persecution is generally regarded as one of the signs associated with the end time prophecies. The second trait, also associated with end time prophecies, is the increase in natural disasters and/or severe weather. These disasters can be any large-scale environmental event. However, the most common occurrences in this analysis seem to be droughts and pandemics. In Münster, Florence, and Iran outbreaks of the plague severely impacted the population. For Münster and Iran this feature was exacerbated by droughts that setback much of the population economically. The third trait is a period of war that directly precedes the movement's progression towards violence, which was present in all four cases. For Münster this came in the form of the Peasant revolts, in Florence it was the French invasion, in Iran it was the wars first with Russia and then with Afghanistan, and for Sudan it was the war with Egypt. In addition to the general expectation that war would precede the second coming, these wars often negatively impacted the community's economic interests as well. As we will see it is not only the portents of end time prophesies that motivate and unite people into action. As these signs first appear, they may heighten the population's awareness; however, as the number of signs increases it becomes easier for the charismatic authority to persuade the population to follow him. These signs often legitimize the charismatic authority's claims and increase conversion among the population. It seems, however, that it is the economic impacts that hasten the transition to violence. In each of the cases examined in this analysis it is precisely this reversal of status resulting from the signs and portents of the end times that ignites the first blow. Many of the most fervent followers were economically impacted by the droughts, the wars, and the persecution and had nothing left to lose. There was no earthly peace; however, by



joining the charismatic authority to ignite the second coming these followers had more to gain. There is a fourth trait that can result in reversal of status as well: subjugation by some foreign authority or colonialism. This trait was only a factor in the Sudanese case study; however, it remains significant. This trait links closely with both war and persecution, and provides a concrete “other” to unite believers against. In Sudan, it was this outside authority that made one of the most profitable occupations illegal and thus impacted the economic status of much of the population. Thus it is important to note that not only are signs of the end times significant factors in revolutionary messianic movements, but that any large scale event that radically impacts the economic interests of the population can unite them against an “other”. The last two characteristics primarily serve to legitimize the charismatic authority’s claims. The first of these primarily appears in the Islamic movements – the physical characteristics of the Mahdi himself. The second characteristic is common across all four movements – the approaching millennial date. As the millennium approaches many believers anticipate the Second Coming even before a claimant emerges.

The next trait will be examined separately precisely because it seems to cross between overarching categories with differing results depending on the stage in which it emerges.<sup>341</sup> If we examined Florence alone, where feelings of loyalty similar to sectionalism or nationalism were already well established by the time Savonarola emerged, it would seem that these feelings of loyalty acted as a motivating and unifying force. In many ways it was Florence’s sectionalist feelings that created an environment suitable for a revolutionary messianic movement. More so than the Florentine religion, the feelings of sectionalism fostered a sense of superiority towards the rest of the country. They alone were the chosen ones and they alone would survive among the descending chaos so rampant prior to the end times. This sense of sectionalism was well established prior to Savonarola’s appearance and as a result he was able to use it to his advantage. Luckily, Florence was not the only case study in which these feelings of loyalty played a role. In Sudan’s case there was no sense of nationalism among the disparate tribes prior to the Mahdi’s emergence. The Mahdi acted as the unifying force that forged a sense of nationalism within the country. This sense of nationalism allowed the movement to persist even

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<sup>341</sup> The feelings of loyalty present within city or state that bind a people together, whether those feelings be more sectionalist or nationalist in nature, will be treated as analogous. Regardless of their specific loyalty, those individuals that found themselves bound to their fellow citizens became increasingly invested in religious movements. The feelings of loyalty already present provided a well-established network of supporters to build on.

after the Mahdi's death. In fact this sense of nationalism could be considered a byproduct of the movement itself. It appears that if present prior to the movement's transition to violence, nationalism can act as a unifying force; however, if produced by the movement it can serve to sustain the movement's longevity. This characteristic more than anything shows that no two movements manifest themselves exactly alike. Depending on the circumstances surrounding a movement's development, characteristics will impact them differently. It is interesting, however, that in both cases these feelings of loyalty played a significant role in the movement's success, albeit in different ways.

The final characteristic is one that has not been identified through the literature review; however, based on the case studies examined in this analysis seems to be an extremely significant factor. In each of the case studies, the element of permissive or inept authority allowed each of the movements to gain momentum and ultimately power. In Münster, repeated inaction on the part of local authorities resulted in the Anabaptists' ability to overtake the town. In Florence, Piero's incompetence ultimately created a situation where Savonarola could easily oust him with the country's support. In Iran, Babism was able to continue to attract followers due to the religious and political authorities' reluctance to execute the Bab. In Sudan, the authorities reacted leisurely due to the belief that the Mahdi's incompetence would lead to the failure of his movement. Once again it becomes a question of reimagining history; however, based on this research one could question whether these movements would have succeeded as they did if the authorities had been more willing to act in the initial stages of development. Regardless, the authorities' reticence to act seems to be one of the primary conditions necessary for success.

The logical next step seems to be an initial comparison between revolutionary messianic movements and popular revolutions. Obviously any substantive analysis is beyond the scope of this study. A comparison with the case studies Crane Brinton examines on the democratic or popular revolutions of France, Britain, Russia, and America outlined in *The Anatomy of Revolution* should provide a few noteworthy commonalities that may prove interesting areas for further research. The first key difference revolves around the country's economic status in the years preceding the revolutions. As Brinton notes, "our revolutions did not occur in societies with declining economies, or in societies undergoing widespread and long-term economic misery

or depression.”<sup>342</sup> In our four case studies there were widespread economic depressions as a direct result of the end-time signs, such as extensive droughts, plagues, and war. Regardless of the society’s economic status the problem remains essentially similar. Whereas in popular revolutions certain groups “feel that governmental policies are against their particular economic interests,” in revolutionary messianic movements it is oftentimes not the government that has hindered the revolutionists’ economic interests, but a reversal of status due to natural disasters and so forth.<sup>343</sup>

A second similarity emerges in what has been referred to as permissive authority throughout this research. Brinton, however, describes the commonality as the general “lack of success” of the constituted authority against the revolutionists.<sup>344</sup> In fact, he is so bold as to “suggest in a very tentative and hypothetical form the generalization that no government has ever fallen before attackers until it has lost control over its armed forces or lost the ability to use them effectively.”<sup>345</sup> As the significance of permissive authority has just been discussed, we will leave the comparison simply at the fact that this research seems to augment Brinton’s research. It is not until the legal authorities fail to act and suppress the revolutionists’ aggression that the movement becomes a full-fledged revolution as opposed to a failed attempt.

The most interesting commonality though tends to be the “puritanical or ascetic or idealistic” quality.<sup>346</sup> Brinton finds religion to be an extremely motivating factor; “large numbers of men can be brought to do certain very important things only under the influence of what we call religion.”<sup>347</sup> For Brinton the religious elements associated with revolutionary movements were among the most important precisely because it changes the dynamic, giving a “much more pervasive tone to the political and economic elements of the struggle.”<sup>348</sup> The main difference between these movements is the element of determinism, which pervades the popular revolutions. It is this deterministic element that makes the revolutionists believe that their success is predestined, for “they are instruments of the inevitable.”<sup>349</sup> For each of the

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, p. 36. An obvious exception to this rule would be the case of Sudan in which the Egyptian government directly impacted Sudanese economic interest by banning slave trade, one of the most prosperous industries.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p. 185.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

revolutionary messianic movements it is the belief that their fighting will ignite the apocalypse. For the popular revolutions, religion emerges after the initial success as a unifying factor, but not the primary motivating factor. Based on the available research it does seem that religion more than anything is key to a revolution's success; however, it begs the question as to whether the type of revolution changes depending on the parent religion. The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this research; however, it does present an interesting opportunity for future research.

Nationalism is the next feature common across revolution types. Brinton notes the emergence of nationalism as a result of the movement's continued success. Similar to the nationalist sentiment that emerged in Sudan as the tribes united under a common cause, Brinton notes that "nationalism helps drive the revolutionists on" to achieve their destiny.<sup>350</sup> However, it is a powerful "tyrant" of sorts that will ultimately lead the society out of the revolutionary fervor and into stability. This tyrant "must handle the centralization of power when the mad religious energy of the crisis period has burned itself out."<sup>351</sup> It is perhaps this commonality that best represents the success of the aforementioned popular revolutions, where the revolutionary messianic movements failed. The popular revolutions were able to overthrow the previous regimes and establish a new regime with great success due to the transition from religious zeal to authoritarian tyrant. In each of the revolutionary messianic movements the charismatic authorities were able to successfully lead their followers for a time; however, as these movements centered around religious zeal in their entirety, without a tyrant to transition the movement and centralize the government each movement was eventually overthrown only to reemerge as pacifist sects. Richard Dekmejian and Margaret Wyszomirski develop this notion in direct application to religious revolutions, identifying the necessary process of legitimation and routinization that each charismatic authority must undergo in order to successfully sustain the movement.<sup>352</sup> In fact, Dekmejian and Wyszomirski go so far as to state that "effective routinization is imperative to stabilize a charismatically conditioned sociopolitical order which is

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>352</sup> Dekmejian, Richard H., and Margaret J. Wyszomirski. "Charismatic Leadership in Islam: The Mahdi of the Sudan." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14.2 (1972): 197-198. "Routinization" specifically refers to the "leader's efforts to build the foundation of a new order on the basis of the legitimacy derived from his charisma." The charismatic authority becomes legitimate through "his heroic record, exemplary qualities, and the value transformation that takes place." According to Dekmejian and Wyszomirski's research this process should occur at the height of power.

inherently unstable.”<sup>353</sup> Long-term success requires some level of social, political and economic change based “upon ‘rational-legal’ means of legitimacy.”<sup>354</sup>

Without making any definitive conclusions, it seems that the personalities involved drives the movement’s resolution and defines the level of its success. Without a “tyrant” capable of controlling and sustaining the movement’s momentum, it cannot sustain itself. In terms of revolutionary messianic movements, if the charismatic authority is both a strong religious figure and a strong political figure capable of undergoing the process of legitimation and routinization, then a separate individual is not needed. We have seen this in Sudan in particular, where the Mahdi was able to unify based on religious grounds, but sustained this with his military and political prowess. We have seen the importance of and difference between authority figures in each of the revolutionary messianic movements. However, in order to draw any definitive link between personalities and a movement’s success more movements would need to be examined. Based on the available literature it does seem possible that revolutionary messianic movements could transition towards popular revolutions if, and only if, the religious zeal shifts towards a more austere administration devoid of religious motivation. For Brinton, this religious zeal is supplanted by a nationalistic fervor that continues to join men together without the level of fanaticism common across the movements examined in this analysis, which cannot be sustained.

Based on this analysis, along with the available literature in this field, we have a general set of variables that we believe influence a movement’s transformation towards violence. We have data available on the four movements examined in this analysis; however, in order to identify the statistical significance of each variable we will need to examine quite a few more. For this reason we will look at twenty-five movements in total, ranging from pacifist to revolutionary all over the world to gain greater insight. Inferential statistics are largely used to generalize about a population, in this case messianic movements, based on a sample. With this in mind we have gathered data on a series of yes or no questions in order to obtain a dataset capable of being analyzed. For each movement, we identified whether a charismatic authority was present; whether natural disasters, war, or plague directly preceded the movement’s transition to violence; whether a foreign authority was present; whether a feeling of nationalism bonded citizens to their country; whether rulers were permissive towards the movement’s

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

progression, and if not, whether the rulers were consistently defeated by the movement; whether the movement's members had recently undergone a reversal of status; whether members were recently persecuted; whether the movement has antinomian or elitist attitudes; whether the movement is inherently mystical and is seeking religious renewal; and finally whether the movement emerged around millennial dates. All data is available in Appendix B. Generally, when analyzing regression output two characteristics tend to be most important: the p-values associated with the coefficients, which identify the statistical significance of each variable's effect on the dependent variable, and the R-square, which provides the overall significance of the regression model. The R-square statistic becomes extremely important when the model is to be used for prediction, in all other cases it is of secondary importance. Because we are merely attempting to identify areas for further research, we are only concerned with the p-values associated with the coefficients.

The first regression model we will evaluate is associated with messianic movements' transition to violence. For this model our dependent variable is the transition to violence, and our independent variables are the thirteen mentioned previously. As we examined the data, it becomes apparent that elitism and antinomianism are closely correlated. For this reason these two characteristics can be combined into one variable. Generally the accepted cut-off for p-values ranges between 5% and 10%; however, because our study has a large variation in unmeasured parameters we will rely on p-values with 15% or less. Once the regression analysis is run a few interesting characteristics emerge, both expected and unexpected. Based on the case studies, we would most likely expect to see that charismatic authorities, reversal of status, war, plague, natural disasters, and persecution appear at the top of the list. However, of these characteristics only reversal of status, war, plague, and natural disaster appear to influence a movement's transition to violence. One characteristic in particular, mysticism, seems to also influence the movement's transition to violence. This could be attributed to the number of Islamic movements examined in the regression analysis. These variables are highlighted in the table below.

SUMMARY OUTPUT		Revolutionary Messianic Movements				
Regression Statistics						
Multiple R	0.753969223					
R Square	0.568469589					
Adjusted R Square	0.309551343					
Standard Error	0.2755891					
Observations	25					
ANOVA						
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F	
Regression	9	1.500759716	0.16675108	2.195556308	0.085681633	
Residual	15	1.139240284	0.075949352			
Total	24	2.64				
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	0.955097353	0.354918352	2.691034001	0.016757277	0.198606796	1.71158791
Charismatic Authority	-0.123859243	0.187923018	-0.659095648	0.519825029	-0.524407672	0.276689186
Reversal of Status	0.25240863	0.149989018	1.682847402	0.113096995	-0.067285394	0.572102653
Natural Disasters	-0.629741648	0.20059195	-3.139416349	0.006750901	-1.057293266	-0.202190029
War	-0.345834539	0.223107577	-1.55007976	0.141960907	-0.821377079	0.129708002
Plague/Disease	0.4116149	0.172971848	2.379664115	0.031032923	0.042934134	0.780295665
Permissive/Ineffective Authority	0.090743322	0.130137551	0.697287767	0.496288904	-0.1866383	0.368124944
Persecution	0.077212038	0.175078061	0.441014928	0.665492343	-0.295958013	0.45038209
Elitism	0.359339523	0.268007332	1.34078243	0.199943892	-0.211904582	0.930583627
Mysticism	-0.243690223	0.149431984	-1.630776865	0.123750559	-0.562196956	0.074816511

**Table 2. Regression Model for Revolutionary Movements.**

This begs the question: if charismatic authorities and permissive authorities have no impact on a movement's transition to violence, will they influence the movement's success? Three of our four movements successfully held the government for any period of time, so this could be the relevant connection. It makes sense that a reversal of status, natural disasters, war, plague, and mysticism would influence a transition to violence because the majority of these factors are considered signs of the end times. However, what makes some movements more successful than others in ousting the government? After performing regression analysis on the data, this time with the dependent variable being whether the movement successfully held government a few interesting factors appear. It appears that not only do the charismatic

authority, foreign authorities, permissive authorities, elitism/antinomianism, and mysticism all influence whether a messianic movement will successfully overthrow the government, but additionally natural disasters, plague, and war continue to impact these movements as well. The fact that nationalism does not appear to impact a movement's transition towards violence or overall success at obtaining control should not be surprising. Based on the analysis it seems most likely that nationalism would impact the movement's longevity in office.

SUMMARY OUTPUT		Successful Deposition of Government				
Regression Statistics						
Multiple R	0.834922448					
R Square	0.697095494					
Adjusted R Square	0.480735132					
Standard Error	0.360300176					
Observations	25					
ANOVA						
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F	
Regression	10	4.182572961	0.418257	3.221919	0.022818	
Residual	14	1.817427039	0.129816			
Total	24	6				
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	0.836580201	0.502683828	1.664227	0.11828	-0.24157	1.91473
Charismatic Authority	0.746055771	0.280026831	2.66423	0.018507	0.145458	1.346654
-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Natural Disasters	0.722140302	0.240777204	-2.99921	0.009567	-1.23856	-0.20572
War	0.522306922	0.255006628	2.048209	0.059776	-0.02463	1.069242
Plague/Disease	0.355181211	0.221039138	1.60687	0.130395	-0.1189	0.829263
Foreign Authority	-0.39083802	0.214209623	-1.82456	0.089478	-0.85027	0.068596
Nationalism	0.311693595	0.221971855	1.404203	0.182053	-0.16439	0.787776
Permissive Authority (and/or Ineffective)	0.458665775	0.168838158	2.7166	0.016704	0.096544	0.820788
-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Elitism	0.883487909	0.354331236	-2.4934	0.025794	-1.64345	-0.12352
Mysticism	-0.46120486	0.204146323	-2.25919	0.040348	-0.89906	-0.02335
Perceived Moral Decline	0.306214303	0.244037657	-1.25478	0.230101	-0.82962	0.217194

**Table 3. Revolutionary Messianic Movements that Successfully Depose the Government**



Now that we have examined the unique differences and striking commonalities across the four in-depth revolutionary messianic movements along with the regression analysis, it does seem clear that a few uniformities stand out. Based on our cursory examination of commonalities between revolutionary messianic movements and popular revolutions it seems as though there are definite commonalities between them as well. In many ways these commonalities raise more questions than answers. Is it the personalities involved that define the type of revolution that emerges and its success? Based on the regression analysis it appears that the answer to this question is no, at least not in its initial transformation. The personalities do seem to play a bigger role in the movement's overall success and longevity. However, more in-depth analysis would need to be done on the personalities of the charismatic authorities before any definitive conclusions could be made. Is it the state of the economy that assists in this classification? The answer appears to be a resounding yes. When the economy is on an upward trend with an inadequate government whose policies directly impact the financial gains of the business class, it appears to be more likely to turn into a popular revolution. Whereas if the economy has been severely impacted by sustained misfortune causing a reversal of status that impacts a wide range of the population, it appears more likely to become a messianic movement. The signs of the end times appear to play a significant role in both the movement's initial transition to violence and overall success. The presence of a foreign authority also seems to impact the movement's ability to gain power; however, to what end would need to be examined in more depth. It also appears that if the religious zeal that motivates the movement transitions towards nationalism, the movement is more likely to succeed and remain in power. In many ways, these factors fuse together in distinct combinations to lead a society on the path towards revolution. In fact, these factors can emerge in societies without ever transitioning towards violence. More than anything, this research identifies various factors that seem common among revolutionary messianic movements with the intent that as religious radicalism continues to increase, we may watch with a careful eye towards situations in which these motivations may turn into something more. The notion that religious zeal can, and does, result in the overthrow of governments and the successful establishment of new societies, is something that should not be forgotten. There seems to be a point in every revolution where the legal government has the opportunity to prevent the revolutionists to continue, and it is this point more than anything that

should be remembered. The ability to act decisively against one's opponent is perhaps one of the only advantages available.

## Appendix A – References

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## Appendix B – Regression Analysis Data Set

Name	Year	Location	Permissive and/or Ineffective Authority	Nationalism	Foreign Authority	Plague/ Disease	War	Natural Disasters	Reversal of Status	Charismatic Authority
Flagellant Movement	1349	Germany	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Muhammad al-Qahtani	1979	Saudi Arabia	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mehmet	1930	Manisa, Turkey	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi	1821	India	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ibn Abu Mahallah	1610	Northwest Africa	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Sayyid Muhammad Jawnpuri (Mahdavi)	1495	India	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Savonarola	1494	Florence	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Lollards	1413	England	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Taborites	1420	Bohemia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Waldensians	1177	Italy	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cathars	11 <sup>th</sup> Century	France	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Tenrikyo	1838	Japan	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ahmadiyah/Qadiyanis	1889	India	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Sudanese Mahdists	1881-1885	Sudan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Almohads (Muwahhids)	1130-1269	Morocco	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Fatimids	900s-1100s	North Africa, Egypt, Syria	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Abbasids	745	Iraq	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Free Spirit	1204	Europe (France, Germany, Belgium)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
God Worshiper's Society	1850-1864	China	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yellow Turban	184	China	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Babi Movement	1844	Iran	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aum Shinrikyo	1987	Japan	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Anabaptist	1534	Munster, Germany	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maitatsine Movement	1960	Nigeria	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lumpa Church	1954	Zambia, Africa	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Name	Year	Location	Successfully Hold Government	Revolutionary	Perceived Moral Decline	Millennial Date	Mysticism	Elitism/ Antinomianism	Persecution
Flagellant Movement	349	Germany	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Muhammad al-Qahtani	1979	Saudi Arabia	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mehmet	1930	Manisa, Turkey	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi	1821	India	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ibn Abu Mahallah	1610	Northwest Africa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sayyid Muhammad Jawnpuri (Mahdavi)	1495	India	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Savonarola	1494	Florence	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Lollards	1413	England	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Taborites	1420	Bohemia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Waldensians	1177	Italy	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cathars	11 <sup>th</sup> Century	France	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenrikyo	1838	Japan	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ahmadiyah/Qadiyanis	1889	India	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sudanese Mahdists	1881-1885	Sudan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Almohads (Muwahhids)	1130-1269	Morocco	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fatimids	900s-1100s	North Africa, Egypt, Syria	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Abbasids	745	Iraq	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Free Spirit	1204	Europe (France, Germany, Belgium)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
God Worshiper's Society	1850-1864	China	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Yellow Turban	184	China	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Babi Movement	1844	Iran	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aum Shinrikyo	1987	Japan	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Anabaptist	1534	Munster, Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Maitatsine Movement	1960	Nigeria	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Lumpa Church	1954	Zambia, Africa	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes